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The Song  
Of Christ's Flock



in the



**THE SONG OF CHRIST'S FLOCK**

**IN THE**

**TWENTY-THIRD PSALM.**



THE  
SONG OF CHRIST'S FLOCK  
IN THE  
TWENTY-THIRD PSALM.

BY  
JOHN STOUGHTON.



THIRD EDITION.



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## PREFACE.

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THE following Meditations on the Twenty-third Psalm contain the substance of Sabbath Morning Discourses, addressed to my own flock at the beginning of this year. The profit and pleasure I derived from composing them, and the spiritual benefit which, I am thankful to say, I know they afforded to others, have induced me to publish them in their present form.

The book is committed to the blessing of the Holy Spirit, with the prayer, that now, when the desire for a true revival of spiritual life is so widely felt, He would make these simple meditations on His own Word the means of promoting the increase and joy of His Holy Catholic Church.

J. S.

FAIRLAWN HOUSE, HAMMERSMITH,  
*Christmas 1859.*





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I.

## The Shepherd.

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“The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.”—  
PSALM xxiii. 1.

Λ

2.



“AND I looked,” says St John, “and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder; and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps.” And so the song of heaven came floating down to earth, and reached the ears of the beloved disciple in the Isle of Patmos. Now it burst on him, as the sound of a river rolling down rapids, or rushing over rocks—now as the sea which he had heard at night, beating on the shingle, or surging from afar; and again, it fell in tones so soft and gentle, that it seemed like the melody of harpers,—yet such as mortal hand had never drawn from the strings of any instrument, well tuned as it might be.

The psalms are like the songs of heaven—as *new*. It is wonderful how they last, without ever becom-

ing wearisome—how their constant freshness equals their venerable antiquity, how they express the feelings of English Christians in the nineteenth century, just as well as they did those of the devout in the long ages before Christ. They are as *varied*. Some of them are like thunder peals, awfully sublime, while this 23d Psalm is truly the song of a shepherd harper, in tone and spirit, no less than in actual fact.

“Is any merry? let him sing psalms.” And here is one which the happiest believer in Christ may sing, with a heart empty of care and full of gladness, like the birds of the wood in a summer’s morning. While it is true, in general, that “as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to a heavy heart,” an exception obtains in behalf of the songs of Zion, and of this in particular, which, though jubilant in its tone, is welcome to the most sorrowful souls, and can make them joyful even in tribulation. Augustine is said to have beheld, in a dream, the 119th Psalm rising before him as a tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God. This 23d may be compared to the fairest flowers that grew around it. The former has even been likened

to the sun amidst the stars—surely this is like the richest of the constellations, even the Pleiades themselves!

Let us invite you to a series of devout and practical meditations on this hymn of thankful piety.

There are psalms which we might have selected, requiring some introductory observations relative to their authorship. But as this seems so plainly to have been written by David, whose name it bears, it would be superfluous to offer any remarks on the subject. As to the period of David's life when it was written, and any incidents in his history to which it may be supposed to relate, we shall omit all consideration for the present, reserving it till we reach those parts of the psalm where such consideration will be of direct use in the illustration of important truths, and the pointing of practical lessons.

Upon the method of meditation we intend to adopt it will be sufficient to observe, that there are two ways in which the psalms may be regarded: You may take them, *historically*, as the compositions of an inspired Hebrew poet in an early age



of the Jewish commonwealth; and from a rigid analysis of each part, and a broad comparison of the whole with other portions of Holy Writ, chronologically different, you may approximately fix the amount of religious truth which came within the knowledge of the sacred writer. In tracing the progress of revelation in the ancient ages, such a method must be rigorously followed, and no anticipations of subsequent disclosures of the Divine Will must be permitted. But you may also take the psalms as aids to Christian thought, for experimental and practical purposes in general, availing yourselves of the whole volume of Scripture to guide and illustrate those *suggestions* which the devout reading of the oldest inspired compositions cannot fail to raise in minds enriched with gospel knowledge, without losing sight of the former method. We avow our adoption of the latter as best fitted for spiritual usefulness. It is proper throughout to distinguish between the simple consciousness of the Psalmist, and the growth and germinant application under Christian culture of those rudimentary ideas of truth and holiness which were peculiar to the dispensation under which he

lived. But that does not prevent the largest employment of our present knowledge in drawing out the thoughts here only *seminally* contained.

*Who IS THE LORD ?*

By the river Euphrates, the people of Nineveh and Babylon were worshipping strange gods—the creatures, perhaps, of a confused blending of old historic traditions with wild speculations on nature's powers. They appeared under forms uncouth and grotesque, such as we now see them graven on the time-worn slab, or carved into the winged bulls of our London and Paris museums.

On the banks of the Nile, the Egyptians were adoring four-footed beasts, creeping things, and fowls of the air. Along the Ganges, the Hindoos were worshipping their thousands of monster-like goddesses and gods; in Persia, they were prostrating themselves before the sun; in Greece, they were building temples to Jupiter and Minerva; and in Italy, they were doing homage to their Etruscan deities. There were gods many, and lords many. But while superstition was world-wide—while darkness covered the earth, and gross dark-

ness the people—here was Jesse's son, one of a nation confined to a little strip of territory, which the great powers of the old Eastern world hardly cared to notice—scarcely seemed to know—a shepherd of Israel, keeping his father's sheep on the plains of Bethlehem, with a mind wholly free from such absurdities, whether Oriental, Greek, or Latin,—David here lifts up his heart to ONE PERSONAL LORD—the Maker of all things—the ground of existence—the cause of all causes—yet unconfounded with any of the beings His hands have formed, and he rests in love, gratitude, and praise on Him as the Shepherd of men, all-mighty, and all-present.

How was this?

The knowledge of the true God had been kept up by revelations—perpetuated and ever increasing—made to Adam and to Enoch, and to Noah and to Abraham, and to Moses and to Samuel. And David, doubtless, had heard Jesse tell of all the holy knowledge handed down from his fathers; and we can well enough imagine that he had listened to the beautiful story of his great-grandmother Ruth, in which the shepherd-like care of Jehovah had been so plainly shewn to the young Moabitess. In all

likelihood, too, there was not wanting a little library of Hebrew books in the farm-house of Bethlehem-Ephratah, labelled with the names of Moses and Joshua, Job and the Judges, whose unrolled pages had excited the curiosity and repaid the careful spelling out, from line to line, of this youth with a ruddy countenance.

And to knowledge heard from the lips of tradition, or written on sheep-skin rolls, personal inspiration, in the case of David, was superadded—not mechanical, like the playing on harp or organ, but mysteriously spiritual, light from heaven bathing the soul, a voice from heaven whispering to the heart, penetrating the thoughts of David about God, and giving them life, purity, and power, such as no Egyptian philosopher and no Greek bard could ever know.

Hence the Lord whom David worshipped and adored was not Baal, nor Bramah, nor Jupiter, nor the sun, nor the hosts of heaven, but *the one* LORD, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob—the God of the whole earth.

The Psalmist knew *who* is the Lord; and all which on that subject he knew, we also know; and more.

Prophets came after David—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the rest. They afford us precious helps to the conception of Him whom the psalm teaches us to celebrate as our Shepherd. But our grand advantage consists in our possession of the revelation of God in Christ. The Lord, whom David had only heard of as the world's Creator—as present through nature—as appearing like an angel to the patriarchs—as feeding the tribes in the wilderness—as protecting and preserving the families of men—blessed knowledge, indeed, though that was!—we have been taught to know, through a higher and more wonderful manifestation: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God.” “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.”

Now, the flock of the holy Church has been ever one. And the Shepherd is ever one, not a succession of persons, but the same from age to age—the *one Lord*. The Shepherd ownership, and rule, and care neither ascend from man to God, nor descend from God to man, but are ever and unalterably divine. The Lord, without the break of a month, or a day, or an hour, has been the Shepherd of the sheep from long before David's time till now. It

plainly follows, then, that the Lord was the Shepherd of the little flock of twelve who were led about Judea in after days, and of whose guidance and feeding we read so much in the four Gospels. And the Lord, too, has been the Shepherd of all the souls who ever since have, in faith and feeling, joined that little nucleus of discipleship. Notwithstanding that, however, we find Jesus—the *man* Jesus—said to the apostles and to us, “I am the good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.” What does this mean? Surely it cannot mean that the Shepherdship has been transferred from divine to human hands? It cannot mean that now the sheep have only the power and love of a man to trust to? The dispensations of Heaven cannot so roll back—Christianity cannot so sink below Judaism. It must, therefore, mean that Jesus Christ, who calls Himself the Shepherd, is no other than David’s Lord and God. God was in Christ. The Lord was mysteriously present—present through the Word in the man of Nazareth. Let the flock, then, draw nigh now, and see their Shepherd Lord revealed to them more fully than He was to David. Still it is He who weigheth the mountains in scales, and the hills

in a balance. Still it is He who said, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." Still it is He whom David heard in the thunder, saw in the sunshine, felt in the winds. Yes—the same. But more. It is also He who stood on the Mount of Beatitudes, and said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It is also He who uttered the parable of the lost sheep. It is also He who wept at the grave, and groaned in the garden, and died on the cross, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

### *What IS THE SHEPHERD?*

*All and more than old Hebrew shepherds typified.*

If we know better than David *who* the Lord is, I am afraid we do not feel as much *what* the Shepherd is. How well could the young Hebrew fill up the picture, of which this one word gives the outline! As, day by day, he mused on his own quiet, patient tending of his father's flock, and then thought of the Lord, there were illuminations at

hand of the title which he makes so beautiful and sacred by thus applying it.

In David's time a shepherd was not what he is now. The employment was pursued by those of noblest name. The sons and daughters of chieftains led sheep into the wilderness, and gathered them round the well to drink. We even read of shepherd kings. And therefore, in unfolding David's idea, we must not think of some humble peasant of our own time, wending his way over the Grampians, or going forth at daybreak from his Swiss chalet to number his flock on some Alpine upland; we must paint a shepherd of the chieftain class—the Abraham type—one like David himself, who with the same hand now held a crook, and now grasped a sceptre.

Shepherds with us are hirelings, then they were owners. The patriarch, very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold—the man, who, as he headed his flock, could say, "I have oxen, and asses, and flocks, and men-servants, and women-servants," is the sort of person we must think of here, as typical of Him who said, "Mine they are, and Thou gavest them."

Flocks were nomadic—wandering—not as with



us shut up within the hedges of a field, or confined to a few leagues of pasturage—not even as Swiss sheep, that have the mountain range, but far more largely free.

Flocks were not driven—not as now hooted and beaten, and chased by angry barking dogs, as we sometimes see in the streets of London; or forced down narrow lanes to be squeezed into horrid butcheries;—but they were led—willingly led—led over fords and through rivers; and still in the East you may see the sheep boldly entering the water at the shepherd's beck and call.

And so our Shepherd is a King—King of kings, Lord of lords—the Ruler of princes. And our Shepherd is owner of the flock, and in His own precious pastoral so claims them, and thus contrasts Himself with the mere hireling:—"He that is an hireling and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming and leaveth the sheep. The hireling fleeth because he is an hireling." "I lay down my life for the sheep."

And our sheep-walk is no little field, no small inclosure, but the wide, open world of nature, the broad lands of providence, and the unmeasured regions of

redeeming *grace*. Wilderness-like, in some respects, our wanderings are akin to those of ancient Israel; but if at times we find ourselves in an *Arabia Petraea*, the Lord in His goodness changes the scene and conducts us to some *Arabia Felix*. And we are not driven, but led; our discipline is not the coercion of force, but the attraction of love. We are not prisoners in the fold; we do not long after a freedom denied—sigh for liberty cut off. Seeming opposites are here reconciled. A paradoxical writer has said, he does not feel he has grasped a subject till he has contradicted himself two or three times. Bating some extravagance in the way of putting the thing, doubtless it contains an element of important truth. To say one moment the sheep are free, and to say the next they are within a guarded inclosure, looks like contradiction; but till we have said both the one and the other, we have no just idea of this wondrously-contrived fold. At liberty are Christ's sheep, and yet restrained; free agents to go where they like, yet secretly, and ineffably, and graciously impelled whither the Shepherd Lord would have them go. And in all their liberty of pasturage, they are fenced by a barrier which is

really invisible to them. That fence, however, is seen standing out in bold relief, like the everlasting rocks, against the approaches of robber spirits who would fain clutch them as their prize. God's presence compasseth His people round, like the two-sided column of fire and cloud, smiling with a face of love on the sheep that follow the Shepherd's voice, frowning with a countenance of terror on every foe, whether like wolf or bandit.

We might speak here of how some of us have been gathered by the Shepherd, how disciplined by the Shepherd, and of His patience, gentleness, and love; but these points we shall have occasion afterwards to treat at large. We would now only just say, wherever we are, the Shepherd can *see* us; that we are never *beneath* His notice, or *beyond* His notice, or where we can *escape from* His notice: and wherever we are, the Shepherd can *hear* us; that from the ends of the earth we can cry, when our heart is overwhelmed, "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I;" and wherever we are, the Shepherd can *reach* us with His crook and with His hand.


*We observe, further, with regard to the Divine*

*Shepherd, that He vouchsafes the flock sufficient protection.*

The assurance and ground of security are presented in the Shepherd's memorable declaration—"My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one."

The not perishing, and the not being plucked out of the Shepherd's hand, are they things explanatory of each other? are they related as cause and effect? The word *neither*, seems to point to two distinct forms of security uniting in the accomplishment of the flock's perfect welfare. They shall *neither* perish, *nor* shall they be plucked out of His hands. *Under* His care they shall be safe; *from* His care they shall not be separated. The Divine point of view is here selected. Looking on those whom He has redeemed—on "the multitude that no man can number"—"the seed," that prophecy declared He should "see"—the "travail of His soul," by which the same prophecy said that He should be "satisfied," the Divine Shepherd thus regards the whole flock as

gathered into His fold ; and in complacent, restful love He rejoices “ over them with singing.” Not as one whose mission may fail—not as one whose purposes may be frustrated—but with a sublime confidence arising out of the command of Infinite power, through oneness with the Eternal Father. He anticipates a perfect redemption of all His people as certain, and realises the consummation of all His most generous desires. Almighty power gives security that the Shepherd will fulfil His pleasure. “Able to keep you from falling,”—His own word reveals His mind and purpose : “He which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ ;” “who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” Nor let it be forgotten, the security vouchsafed by the Shepherd depends not simply on the permanence of His relationship to the flock, but it depends as well on the deep and abiding love of the flock, and of their devoted obedience to Him. The life insured is not simply or mainly a state of acceptance ; it is also the possession of holiness. The



perishing averted, is not chiefly some physical infliction hereafter of iron rod or burning fire, but it is the expiration of spiritual vitality, the ceasing to beat of those impulses to love and goodness which are the life-blood of the renewed. The meaning of the absolute decree, "They shall not perish," cannot be exhausted till we have drawn from it the idea—they shall not lose what I have bestowed. "This is the promise which He hath promised you, even eternal life." Nor can the plucking out of the Shepherd's hand be merely palpable violence, or literal assault—a something from without, which Divine power will avert, leaving still the possibility of the occurrence of another thing within, even more fatal, namely, abandonment to self, to pride, unbelief, and worldliness. It is not that Christ means He will take care that the devil shall not spoil Him of the reward of redemption, while human depravity may defeat His plan. It is not that, as He watches effectually against foreign adversaries, He may at the same time, notwithstanding, allow His people, through the failure of His grace upon their resistance, to slip through His fingers. No, that cannot be what His words mean; plucking out of His

hands must surely signify all effectual temptation, all yielding to the power of damning sin. "My sheep hear my voice and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life."

In point of fact, I believe that the majority of true Christians do not leave Christ's fold, for there is an enormous distinction to be made between *infirmities* and backsliding, and between backsliding and apostasy. Some, indeed, do wander—they fearfully fall away; but their subsequent restoration, through repentance and tears, and washing anew in the fountain for sin and uncleanness, are a fulfilment of the Shepherd's words—they do not perish; they are not plucked out of His hands. Now, should any have a conscience so very obtuse, and reason so very blind as to be befooled by the sophism, "I was once in the hands of the Shepherd-Lord, and therefore I am so now"—all one can say to such would be, that the sign of being protected is to avail ourselves of protection; that the only proof of being one of Christ's sheep is to shew His mark on the *ear* and the *foot*—to hear His voice and to follow Him; and that there was nothing for David *in* his fall, and for Peter *in* his

denial, but utter misery ; and that hope came to those poor wanderers only through the coming of repentance.

And here, solemnly remember—many who say, “The Lord is my Shepherd,” belong to Him only in name. As life may look like death, so death may look like life. Go into the garden : that seemingly blasted branch, when cut, may reveal within the lingering circulation of vital sap ; but another tree, seemingly more hopeful, may be found, when the knife removes the bark, hard and dry as if already severed from the root. And a soul, that gives but little promise of what is good, may, when God’s garden-knife is applied, begin to bleed so as to shew it lives ; but another, taken by many and by itself to be most hopeful, may, when Providence or the Word makes a like incision, remain as dry and hard as a piece of flint-stone. A soul that does not *bleed* when gashed by affliction or by the truth, is, without controversy, a dead one. A professor, who, with hardening pride, presumes on his security while he lives in sin, and turns off the edge of Divine reproofs by the perversion of Christian doctrine, is no sheep of Christ’s, nor ever was.



*Wherein* CONSISTS THE SPIRIT OF THE SONG?

*It is the song of the humble—not of the proud.*

Some men are self-contained. Isolated from their fellows through want of sympathy, they also keep aloof from God through want of faith. They rely on themselves alone, on their own deep wisdom, on their own strong will. They are of the Stoic stamp—can resist and endure; but this they cannot do—*rely*. Too full of self are they for that. They are like hard, rugged, angular-shaped masses of rock, standing up from the surface of ocean or lake, with not a tree or a flower, a shred of moss, or a spot of lichen. The heart out of which this song of the flock comes is not of that sort. It is soft, and gentle, and child-like, because humble. The feeling of the singer is not, "I am strong, and can save myself;" but, "I am helpless, and the Lord alone can save me." The sheep of Christ cleave to Him, seeing nothing between themselves and utter ruin and wretchedness but His love and care. They regard His mediation as their only hope—His cross their one refuge.

*It is the song of the devout—not the idolatrous.*

Some idolise the creature, or, out of what they find in creatures, take and idealise something which they adore. Admiration and love become idolatrous—beauty, gentleness, virtue, genius, taste, talent, and eloquence are idolised. The heart is turned into a heathen shrine, dedicated to some new god or goddess. Jehovah is not enthroned there, but another is, in a way not less provoking to the holy and jealous One than the superstitions and mummeries of heathen temples. The heart joined to these idols cannot be joined in this song. It is such music as can be made only where Divine love reigns supreme, and the contrite and the humble “tremble” at His word.

*It is the song of the trustful—not the suspicious.*

And can there be any suspicion in reference to the Lord? Yes, if not openly expressed, yet virtually and in effect. Were we to tell the secrets of our hearts, should we not have to confess that sometimes, in our troubles, sorrows, and vexations, we have harboured the idea that there was something unkind, and even harsh and severe, in the dealings of the Lord toward us, as if He were merely an absolute sovereign—a God of awful power

—a ruler with irresistible authority, and not the best of friends, and most perfect of fathers? In such a temper of mind we can never sing this song of happy trustfulness.

*It is the song of the hopeful—not the desponding.*

I met the other day with a remarkable passage in Herodotus. “If God shall some day see fit not to give rain to the Greeks, but shall punish them with a long drought, they will be swept away by famine, since they have nothing to rely on but rain; and if the country below Memphis, which is the land that is always rising, continues to rise at the rate it has done, how will it be possible for the Egyptians to avoid hunger without rain, and with no river to overflow their corn-lands?” And so the heathen, reckoning on the capriciousness of the gods, contemplated evils that would never come, and alarmed themselves with fears unsubstantial and groundless. But the conjecture of the ceasing of the rain, and of the non-overflowing of the Nile, was not more idle than are some of our desponding dreams of the future, conjuring up the idea of troubles that will never come. “Oh, what shall we do, should such and such a thing happen?” we

anxiously inquire. In our darkness and doubt we creep timidly on, asking, "Who shall roll us away the stone?" when the stone is already gone, turned over by some angel hand. The spirit of the song before us has nothing of that desponding tone in it, but is jubilant with hope. "I shall not want." Surer than the constancy of nature is the constancy of God.

"Although the fig-tree shall not blossom,  
Neither shall fruit be in the vines;  
The labour of the olive shall fail,  
And the fields shall yield no meat;  
The flock shall be cut off from the fold,  
And there shall be no herd in the stalls:  
Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,  
I will joy in the God of my salvation."

There is a distinction to be made between a sense of need and the existence of want—between the sensation of thirst and the absence of water. The one must, in thought, be separated from the other. Our Lord says, "He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again,"—he will need more; by which He means, there shall be the existence of want. Look at the passage deeply. It may mean an existence of spiritual want, without a sense of the *need* of spiritual blessings—want without the feeling of

want ; for the *fact* of necessity is often found without any consciousness of necessity. Abundant want of Divine good is universal. In how few hearts is there the realisation of this !

Again, our Lord says, " But he that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst ; " by which He means, that though there will certainly ever be, in spiritual minds, a sense of spiritual need, spiritual desire, spiritual dependence, it will be without the existence of any actual want ; for the want will be met, the need supplied, the appetite satisfied. In heaven, " they hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; " by which we understand, that, in that world, no want will be left unprovided for, though there must evermore be a sense of need, and a conviction of helplessness.

Our previous thoughts have proceeded on the recollection that the Lord's sheep are very needy creatures, and that they feel it, but that their needs are all arranged for ; wherefore they will never want. The Shepherd's resources must satisfy us we shall never want. The Shepherd himself, in His own person and nature, (being the all-sufficient Jehovah,) gives thereby proof and pledge that we shall never want.

The Shepherd hath said—

“Behold the fowls of the air : for they sow not,  
neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your  
heavenly Father feedeth them.”

And the Church can sing—

“The birds, without barn  
Or storehouse, are fed ;  
From them let us learn  
To trust for our bread.  
His saints what is fitting  
Shall ne’er be denied,  
So long as ’tis written,  
‘The Lord will provide.’”

The Shepherd hath said—

“When thou passest through the waters, I will be  
with thee ; and through the rivers, they shall not  
overflow thee : when thou walkest through the fire  
thou shalt not be burned ; neither shall the flame  
kindle upon thee.”

And the Church replies—

“Though troubles assail,  
And dangers affright—  
Though friends should all fail,  
And foes all unite ;  
Yet one thing secures us,  
Whatever betide,  
The Scriptures assure us,  
‘The Lord will provide.’”

The Shepherd declares—

“And I will bring the blind by a way they know not ; I will lead them in paths they have not known : I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.”

And believers can respond—

“His call we obey,  
Like Abraham of old,  
Not knowing our way;  
But faith makes us bold.  
For though we are strangers,  
We have a good Guide;  
And trust, in all dangers,  
‘The Lord will provide.’”

The Shepherd promises—

“No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper ; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord ; and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.”

And the flock can echo back—

“No strength of our own,  
Or goodness we claim;  
Yet since we have known  
The Saviour's great name,

In this, our strong tower,  
In safety we hide;  
Almighty His power,  
‘The Lord will provide.’”

In conclusion. What associations gather round these ancient Hebrew words, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want!” A mysterious interest is linked to an object on which we know others have looked in the long march of generations before we were born. It is felt as the eye, keeping memory and imagination at work, rests on some old oak in the midst of a historically famous forest; or as it glances on some old castle-keep, a place of defence in troublous times; or as it wanders over some far older rock or mountain range, along whose zig-zag paths armies have toiled, and under whose shadows many a thoughtful traveller has meditated and reposed. And literary themes, social questions, moral truths, religious facts, all in addition to their own intrinsic worthiness and moment, gather round them like associations of interest. I fancy what true and touching tales of thought and sentiment and feeling might be read, if we could have revealed to us the experience of individual souls in connexion with this text.



For how many centuries it has been present to thoughtful minds, and yet they have felt how inexhaustible is the story of their Shepherd's care, especially as seen in the life and death of Jesus, so full of love and wonder. Books have been written, sermons preached, hymns sung upon this one subject; yet what floods of living water there are, welling up in the depths of the fountain, undrawn! At present only the surface has been broken of the ever virgin soil.

As a source of strength and consolation in trouble, the truth we have pondered is incomparable. Tell me that I am only suffering the common lot of humanity; that it is useless to repine at Providence; that time is the healer of sorrow, and fortitude the noblest virtue of man—such commonplaces are cold comfort. But make me feel that the Lord is my Shepherd; that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself; that the greatest of sufferers is the Lord of Providence; that “we have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities;” that our sorrows are sanctified by His sympathy, and constitute the discipline by which He keeps the sheep within the fold, and prepares them

for the pastures of Zion ; and that never is a tie which binds a comfort to us unloosed but by the hand of Him whose love is beyond suspicion,—make me feel all that, and I can rejoice even in tribulation.

Wonderfully beautiful powers of healing there are in nature, both for body and mind—medicinal, salubrious, refreshing—the virtue of plants, the qualities of minerals, the woods and the hills, the sea and the heavens, the bath and the breeze, the music of birds and the voices of friends ; but poor types are they of what a conviction of the Shepherd's love can do for sick and wounded, feeble and downstricken souls.



## II.

### The Pastures.

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“ He maketh me to lie down in green pastures : He leadeth me  
beside the still waters.”—PSALM xxiii. 2.



It is related of the mother of David Hume, that, after professing the gospel for some years, her principles were undermined by his sophistries, and she became the prey of a miserable scepticism. When oppressed by sickness, and in the prospect of death, she bethought herself of the hopes of which she had been bereft, and, writing from Scotland to her son in London, she asked him to supply her with some substitute for what he had been too successful in snatching from her hands. I think it is stated that she died before receiving a reply. Reply? David Hume was a man of wonderful ability, and that ability was of the most acute and ingenious kind; but it was far beyond David's power to provide his poor mother with a substitute for what he had so recklessly torn from her feeble grasp.

How could a substitute be found for the consolation which this psalm affords? To what pastures can philosophy lead us which are not brown and

burnt-up in comparison with the fresh green here? Where can it find us a place to lie down in, but amidst barren rocks, inhospitable at the best, and often cutting with their sharp edges the wretched travellers who are so foolish as to lean on them? And as for refreshment, it takes us away from the living stream to broken cisterns that can hold no water. Nor can poetry do for us more than philosophy, except to awaken hopes it does not fulfil. Sentimentalism, employing the charms of imagination, can only create pastures and streams which prove in the end like the mirage of the desert; so that when we, in our simplicity, run to drink, the fountains are turned into sand, and when we would lie down on the soft, green grass, we find a bed of hard black stones. We shall have to wait a long while before we shall get a substitute for this song of the flock:—

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:  
He leadeth me beside the still waters.” Think of

#### THE PROVISIONS CONNECTED WITH THE FOLD.

*Breadth* and *freedom* are ideas suggested.

I fancy, if I were reading this psalm in Palestine

—on the plains of Bethlehem—in the valley of Sychar, or on the slopes of Carmel—and saw the extent of David's grazing lands, that a different impression would be made on my mind, from what I have when thinking of this figurative language in connexion with recollections of meadows in Norfolk or Herefordshire. Great, wide, open, unhedged tracts of country—the green margin touching the basement of the azure heaven—as free for the roaming sheep as the sky overhead for the flying bird,—these are the pastures which David had in his eye. And they are appropriate images of the compass and comprehensiveness of those provisions which are divinely and graciously made for your soul and mine. Not scant and stinted are any of the privileges of gospel grace afforded to the Church in divine ordinances and ministries; and, above all, what a grand, bold, and majestic sweep of truth there is in those revelations of redeeming love, on which alone our souls can live, and amidst which they can find healthy and bracing exercise!

“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall *go in and out*, and find pasture.” Christ is not a prison door. The flock are not so folded



as to prevent their going in and out in the exercise of holy and beautiful thought. There are limits to religious inquiry, as there are limits to all kinds of inquiry—not imposed by arbitrary enactment, but arising out of the constitution of human nature. The Bible does not set up restrictions on religious thought—like hurdles to keep off sheep from some portions of a luxuriant meadow. Mysteries there are *round* the paths of religious instruction, which we are not so much *prohibited* from looking into, as *prevented* by the simple impossibility of ever fathoming them.

There is, after all, I believe, as much liberty of thought allowed in theology as in anything else. In science, we cannot go beyond divine facts. In theology, we are allowed to go quite as far. Be sure of something *divine* to rest on—you may safely let your thoughts reach there. The Bible, and the Spirit, and the facts of human experience, are pasture lands for souls to enjoy and expatiate in—making us feel as free, giving us a sense of liberty more sublime, than the Arab feels when, issuing from his tent at sun-dawn, he grasps the dewy mane of the foaming steed, springs into the saddle, and gallops

forth with lightning speed over unclaimed but God-given hills and plains, which he esteems to be as much his own as the brother sheikh whom he meets with and salutes in his fiery way.

The Christian can well bear the taunt of "narrow-minded," for he knows that none have fields of thought opened to them so broad and boundless as those into which Christ leads His own.

I should suppose, further, that there must be a peculiar *beautiffulness* in Oriental pastures in the spring season, when the grass is green.

"From the top of the mound," says Layard, respecting Arban, "the eye ranged over a level country, bright with flowers, and spotted with black tents and innumerable flocks of sheep and camels. During our stay at Arban, the colour of these plains was undergoing a continual change. After being for some days of a golden yellow, a new family of flowers would spring up, and it would turn, almost in a night, to a bright scarlet, which would again as suddenly give way to the deepest blue. Then the meadows would be mottled with various hues, or would put on the emerald green of the most luxuriant of pastures."

The green grass, the yellow, scarlet, and blue flowers, are parables of the beauty which spiritual minds can see in God's Word and in God's work, under the illumination of God's Spirit. Mere speculation is wretchedly poor employment; but, on the other hand, a narrow, selfish utilitarianism is utterly unworthy of the Christian. Not simply for the sake of the *use* that truth is to us should we value it—that would be valuing it only for *our* own sake—but for *its* sake—for God's sake—for the sake of the beauty which He has put within it, and poured all over it—should we admire, and prize, and appropriate the revelations, facts, promises, principles, precepts, and prospects of His Word. What colour is to the eye in all its magic variety of tint, in its loveliest flashes and its most solemn shades, that truth is to be to the soul. What are eyes given to man's soul for, but to see *that*?


Most commentators insist here on the ideas of food and refreshment. There is no objection to this, if they do not stop at these. Pastures are for food, waters for refreshment; and if we do not take in the spiritual import of the figures so considered, we shall not be prepared fully to appreciate what I con-

ceive to be the main idea of the Psalmist. Food, rich and satisfying for the enhungered spirit of man, there is in Christ's Book, and in Christ's Supper, and in Christ's Word, preached as well as read, and in Christ Himself—"the meat indeed." Water, living and everflowing, there is in the Holy Spirit of God, who testifies of Christ, who renews us day by day. But while these ideas have a place here, we miss the special force of the passage if we do not mainly dwell upon, and make all that subsidiary to the idea of *repose*.

Rest is the central thought. The food-provision of the pastures, and the refreshment of the waters, prepare for rest. "*He maketh me to lie down.*" The stillness of the waters is restful, calm, quiet, soothing—calling to rest, ministering to rest, sympathising with rest—(how marvellous are the sympathies of animate and inanimate nature, what depths of wonder lie buried under the upper surface of the universe !)

A flock at rest is a very pleasant picture, as we sometimes see it in a sunny day in the pastoral districts of Old England. In Oriental form, we have the same thing in the book of Moses: "And Jacob

journeyed to Succoth, and built him an house, and made booths for his cattle." Under the shelter of long boughs, cattle and sheep are seen lying down in the heat of the sun. It typifies another kind of rest. How much we read in the Bible about *rest*! How the idea is ever and anon suggested as we turn over the pages of this Book of books! How it comes up in preaching every Sunday,—a golden thread running through the texture of the sermon! The turnings of our thoughts—the wants of our soul—providential circumstances—the Spirit's teaching, altogether weave the idea of rest into manifold patterns; so that though the thread be the same, the figure into which it is turned needs not be twice alike. We greatly want rest in a world of work and warfare, pain and sorrow. Poor, heavy-laden humanity is ever crying for it, ever asking for some one to come and lift off its burdens. How do our speculations and our pursuits, and our struggles and our schemes, reveal the deep inborn desire for rest! Men are ever fretting and fuming, and wearying themselves in the greatness of their way, and seeking, by means of wealth, pleasure, learning, fame, social reforms, and political revolutions, some



relief from the pressure of evils, and extrication from the entanglements of difficulty.

There is, after all, only *one Rest-giver*.

"Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to lie down at noon." The rest we want in so many ways Jesus gives. He gives it as pardon to the conscience, truth to the reason, and love to the affections; and the rest vouchsafed on earth is the same in nature as that which is to be realised in heaven.

The flock at rest ruminates. Suggestive is the picture of the sheep under beech or elm, at the brook side by noon-day, with their meek, quiet eyes roving over the grass and the wild flowers! The free Christian spirit having received God's truth into itself, and looking forth with all its power of perception on the landscape of divine words, and ways, and works, ruminates on what it has received; and quiet thoughtfulness is as salutary as it is pleasant. To *rest* on divine things, to dwell upon them, to look unto them calmly, and silently, and trustfully, and lovingly; that does us more good, and makes us vastly wiser, than reading books of controversy, and listen-

ing to polemical discussions, in which victory is the main thing the disputants crave to win. There is a great difference between defending a truth as a theological dogma, and knowing it as the aliment of spiritual life ; and therefore, I believe a few hours' devout and tranquil reflection, in dependence on the Spirit, will help a man to more of truth and wisdom, than he will get by months of noisy wrangling with logicians, skilled or unskilled in the learning of the schools.

Such are the provisions,—freedom—beauty—nourishment—rest.

#### THEIR RELATION TO EACH OTHER, AND TO SOMETHING ELSE.

The idea of rest connects itself, as I have indicated, with those of freedom, beauty, food, and refreshment. There is no repose for the imprisoned and the crippled, the starving and the thirsting. And rest is heightened by the beauty spread around the resting one ; and so all that God ministers as provision for spiritual liberty, the enjoyment of the beauties of holiness, the feeding of the intellect with truth, and the refreshment of the affections by the living

water, contributes to the peace and the calmness and the plenary satisfaction of the sanctified soul.

But, after all, these blessings cannot be always realised. We cannot always be careering over the green pastures, exulting in our freedom ; we cannot always be drinking in the sense of beauty, nor be always in the act of feeding upon truth, nor be always in the conscious enjoyment of repose. All these things at once are incompatible ; and one or other of them without change, or in unmixed succession, so that life should be a chain made up of these links alone, is also impossible. We cannot make our earthly existence a transition from one of these forms of enjoyment to another, with nothing intermediate of another kind ; the life-girdle has in it other rings.

First, life is for work ; and next, life is for suffering ; and what I would have you see and feel is the place which work and suffering in our world hold in relation to those forms of blessing shadowed out in the Psalmist's words.

Look at the law which obtains in nature.

A man who has never done much hard work, who



has never been in some way chained to the oar of toil, or has never suffered from sickness, never carried a load of pain, is a stranger to the full sense of liberty which belongs to him who, after a year's routine of labour, takes a few days' holiday, or, after months of wearisome illness, once more inhales the fresh spring air.

The sense of beauty strikes not nor thrills the lazy sentimentalist as it does the vigorous and energetic worker, or the painfully-disciplined sufferer in God's school of affliction.

And food ! The poor animal in human form who just lives to eat—the glutton who, like the horse-leech, is ever crying, “ Give, give ”—and the epicure who critically asks, “ Who will shew us any good ? ”—know not the relish and the satisfaction which the patient has who eats the “ savoury meat ” prepared by loving hands, or the hardy farm-servant who has won an appetite for his simple supper.

And rest ! When do we most enjoy it ? When we have done nothing but sit by the fire all day long ? or when we have been busy in healthful work ? After a laborious mountain walk, which has tried the breath and stretched the limbs, and put muscle and

sinew to the highest pitch of tension—to stretch oneself in some humble cottage on a bag of fresh heather, or a heap of clean straw, is luxury which they know not who, after rolling through the parks in carriages, lie tossing about on beds of down.


And rest, when it comes after pain, who can describe the elysium ! And rest, when it comes after war, what a paradise it makes ! “Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about.” The intense enjoyment of rest ever comes in the way of contrast. Destroy the contrast, and you destroy the intense enjoyment. Rest always is almost no rest at all. The richest rest must be won. It must be earned or paid for before hand.

The law holds in the world of *spiritual experience*. Let me not be misunderstood. That rest which springs from pardoning mercy, redeeming love, must be free. In no sense can it be bought. It is the purest of gifts. Yet there is a condition even for that. The condition of repentance and of faith ; and also, doubtless, the joy attendant on forgiveness, is proportioned to the depth of the spiritual agony with which previously that forgiveness has

been sought. Yet the condition there is not work ; but that of suffering, or both, you must count as conditions on which alone deep, rich, holy rest, in the way of an eminent fruition of God's truth, promises, ordinances, and gracious vouchsafements, can be obtained by Christian souls.

Practical men, earnest workers—those who are always themselves bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, and helping others to do the same—they are the people who have most satisfaction and repose in their religion. They do God's will, and so they learn to know of the doctrine. A week's work as a city missionary, or a tract distributor, or a visitor of the sick—a few months' trial of Sunday-school teaching—little acts of kindness done patiently and perseveringly for the undeserving and the thankless—will serve more to put a man's soul in the right state for reading his Bible to edification, hearing the word with joy, coming to the sacrament with pleasure, or tasting any other spiritual delights, than reading shelves full of books, or spending months on months in controversy.

People complain of the little pleasure they have in religion. Often the cause is, they could work, but



will not. He who honestly asks, "Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do?" is he who alone can with deepest gratitude exclaim, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures."

But all cannot work. God has other discipline for them. Yet theirs is obedience. What instructive words are those—"Though He was a son, He learned obedience by the things which He suffered." Not only did His suffering prepare Him for obedience—not only did submission water the roots of service—but His suffering *was* obedience. His obedience was seen in the wilderness under temptation, and in the garden as He drank the brimming death-cup, and as He hung on the cross with thorn-torn temples and nail-pierced hands, and a soul in darkness. "And when He had, by Himself, purged our sins, He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." And through the same obedience the sheep, like the Shepherd, find restfulness of soul.

THE CONNEXION BETWEEN ALL THIS AND THE  
MEDIATION OF THE DIVINE-HUMAN SHEPHERD.

*He is the Author of the flock's rest.*

We fancy rest is an easy thing to give to human souls. But is it?

It may be easy to give rest to the honest sons and daughters of toil, overworked by heavy tasks inconsiderately imposed;—and worthy is it of those who profess to rejoice in the love and care of the one glorious Rest-giver, to aid not only in securing to them the seventh portion of their days, set apart from the beginning by their Creator, for repose, but also to assist in contriving and bestowing now and then hours and days that shall come like pieces of blue sky in the midst of the rainy clouds of life—seasons that shall lift off the yoke from the labourer's neck, and give the pent-up citizen liberty to range over the green fields of God's creation. It may be easy to give the innocent child rest from his lessons, or even the virtuous patient rest from his pain. Yet anything but easy—rather impossible is it for us to give rest to those who bear the guilt of crime, to those who feel the stings of conscience, to those whose bosoms are festering with evil passions. The man whose misdeeds have brought him to the treadmill, the penal settlement, the condemned cell in Newgate, and at last the gallows-foot, is not one to

whom you can give rest in the shape of liberation from the consequences of broken law. Society would protest against your turning loose on itself such violators of its obligations. The sense of justice wrought in you by God would say the culprit must not be left to do his wretched liking with impunity. And as to the sting that wounds and poisons the soul of pleasure, in the man whose pleasure is in vice,—by no process can mortal hands cut it out or crush its fangs. Nor can you by the voice of persuasion hush the tempest of sensuality and intemperance, malice and revenge, envy and pride, suspicion and selfishness, into the calm of virtuous affections. There are difficulties in the way of giving rest to sinful souls that are seen to be enormous, as soon as one turns attention to them.

Such difficulties in the highest degree had to be overcome in the Divine bestowment of the blessings we have attempted to describe. Something had to be done in the way of *propitiation*, *reconciliation*, and *sacrifice for sin*—that God *might be just and the justifier* of the ungodly. Bible words, with a deep meaning, are all these, not to be explained away, but standing prominent in the everlasting

record, and pointing to what we call *satisfaction*,—an idea which the devout study of Scripture has now at last fixed irradicably on the minds of most Christians in connexion with redemption, by the good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep. All common social necessities and provisions afford insufficient analogies to what was wanting, and what is provided, in relation to the guilt of human souls ; yet I cannot divest myself of the conviction, that what social justice, what I would call the public conscience, in our day indispensably requires, when its laws are violated, is somewhat *akin*—does afford some likeness to what, in the great case now before us, Divine justice requires as to a mark set on sin—an exaction of penalty for guilt—an act of righteousness to maintain law and order—to keep the sceptre strong and the throne stable. Here we cannot help recognising a resemblance between government in heaven and government on earth. But the *substitution* which mere social justice does not admit, Divine mercy and love, according to the gospel, has not only allowed but expressly provided—and here it is that there is a contrast between the government of God and that of man. The dissimilarity is in the

*substitution*, not in the *expiation*—in something being by Another done on our behalf to honour justice, not in anything of the kind being done at all.

“We have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” We fix our faith on that declaration without asking for, or expecting in this life at least, any full explanation of the ground and method of the mysterious but most merciful provision. Yet receiving redemption *through the blood* of Christ, we are taught that one of the great difficulties in the way of the gift of rest to guilty souls is gone. What would prevent the judge on the bench, as the representative of the throne, and of that social justice which the throne embodies, from giving rest from punishment and death to the prisoner at the bar, does not—now after the stupendous manifestation of righteousness in the cross of Christ—hinder the infinite Lawgiver from shewing mercy to, and shedding the rest of pardon and peace upon, the sinful creature.

And something more has to be done in the way of *spiritual renewal*. There must be a new birth in order to the bestowment of rest. Clearly the common analogies help us here. While the con-



sciousness of any social crime, and the dominion of any admitted vice as against others or ourselves, render rest impossible for the soul; so also the dominion of any kind of sin whatever as against God, the consciousness of its power, and a prostration to its tyranny, must be incompatible with mental tranquillity and satisfaction. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

It is an absolute and eternal necessity that sin should be mortified—that spiritual life should be given for the purification of a carnal nature, if ever a soul is "to lie down in green pastures." And it is a necessity, not only on the common ground that holiness is a condition of peace, that the bosom must have impure appetites and desires rooted out, or be everlastingly troubled with their prickly thorns; but also because spiritual perception, which must have its ground in spiritual life, is essential to the enjoyment of the pleasures we have described. The pastures of the good Shepherd are not green in the world's eye, nor are the waters restful. "The natural man discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God." That man may have the freedom wherewith Christ makes His people free, his heart must be set

at liberty ; that he may taste the sweetness of Divine grace he must feel a corresponding relish ; and that he may discern the lovely and the grand in Divine truth, his heart must be filled with a longing for the spiritually beautiful and sublime. "My heart is restless," said Augustine, "till it rest in Thee." But never will it rest on the bosom of God till it be weaned from the world's vanities by the Divine discipline.

Now, the second grand condition of spiritual rest is supplied by the all-sufficient Shepherd in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

*The Shepherd, too, is the Guardian of the flock's rest.*

"The Lord saved Hezekiah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all other, and *guided* them on every side." In that *guiding*, guardianship was implied. So is protection in this *leading*. The Shepherd guards wherever He leads.

He is a watcher. It was a brave reminiscence in the life of the shepherd lad—"Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock : and I went out after

him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth : and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him." Intrepid young hero ! how the recollection braced him to accept the challenge of the gaunt and grim Philistine ! And what satisfaction it gave him to think how faithful and vigilant he had been in the preservation of his good father Jesse's property ; and with what courage he had rushed after the beast of prey, and how with his staff he had struck and beat down the thief, and plucked the poor panting sheep from the gore-stained jaws of the savage brute ; and how he had then made an end of him altogether, as he rose to revenge the deliverance, tearing the monster, as Samson did the lion, as though it had been a kid ! Whether or not David thought of that in connexion with his heartfelt song in celebration of the Shepherd of Israel, we are helped by it, as in a parable, to picture what *He* does for His assaulted flock, making the evil one relinquish his prey ; how He rescues them "out of the mouth of the lion," when there is no man to stand by, and all forsake ; how He delivers them from every evil work, and preserves them unto His eternal kingdom ; how, finally, He

strikes the arch-fiend himself, bruising him with fatal blows upon the head, as with spiteful malice he turns to bruise the Conqueror's heel ; and how, when the great battle of redemption is over, He will present the whole flock He had in charge to *His* Father, saying, "Of all that Thou gavest me I have lost nothing."

Poetry has dreamt of angel-watchers, and artists have depicted them in golden colours, and sculptors have carved them in wood and marble over windows and doorways, with a beautiful charm and fascination ; but it is all unreal till Faith bethinks herself of the grand old words, "The angel that delivered me from all evil,"—and forthwith the true angel-watcher, the WORD, who, in mysterious ways, threw His "healing wings" over patriarchs and prophets, and who, as the incarnate Son of God, promised to "be with us alway, even to the end of the world," is felt, though invisible, to be not far from any one of us. Not a mere fiction is that, the sport and play of imagination, like the lay-figure which the painter bends into what form and attitude he likes ; but a divine, living, and ever-glorious presence, impalpable, but most real, saying, "Touch me not ;"

but saying also, "It is I, be not afraid." Christ was with the disciples going to Emmaus, but they knew Him not, though "their hearts burned within them, as He talked with them by the way, and opened to them the scriptures." Then when the wayfarers went in at eventide to rest themselves, the Stranger threw off His disguise and revealed the secret of His name. So at the end of life's dusty journey, when the mysterious time-dream shall melt into the awful but blessed realities of eternity, the Angel-Shepherd, who has for days and days been walking by our side (to what an extent "an unknown one!") shall make Himself known, — a revelation more transporting than that of Joseph to his brethren. "Now," says the thoughtful Augustine, "the Lord shews Himself to us as *He will*; then He will shew Himself to us as *He is*."

III.

The Restoration.

“He restoreth my soul.”—PSALM xxiii. 3.




"AND He is the Saviour of the body." So says the Apostle Paul ; and while by the " body," he means the Church, his words are no less justly applicable to the figure expressing the spiritual fact. The salvation of the body was one of the ends contemplated by the laws of Moses. Many of the ceremonial provisions of that wonderful code hide under their typical forms what, in modern phrase, we should style sanitary regulations. A Jew in the climate of Palestine observing the abstinence, performing the ablutions, and attending to the other precepts which the lawgiver of the wilderness imposed, pursued a course adapted to preserve to himself the healthiness and the vigour of his physical frame.

The gospel is not behind the law. Moses was not a better friend to man than Christ. The purification of the body which the New Testament enjoins is not such as certain deluded persons



imagine and adopt—such as generates filth, debility and disease, and destroys one half of human nature under pretence of saving the other. Rather is it a mortification calculated to preserve and develop the physical powers, by destroying those vicious habits—those prurient lusts, which are as worms sucking up vital energies—as ulcers drawing corporeal strength. A thorough Christian, who covers his whole conduct with the influence of religion, is most likely to have what is proverbially extolled as constituting the most enviable condition of our present existence, “a sound mind in a sound body.”

Certainly not as mere displays of astounding power—as sparklings of glory thrown off for show and pride—did Jesus perform His restorative miracles; nor yet are they to be considered only as divine signatures to His mission. Neither are we to confine ourselves even to that very important view of them in which they appear as pictures of a spiritual salvation. They are *bond fide* the merciful acts of our glorious Redeemer, who, in the design of salvation as in the presenting of truth, was never one-sided; who had a care for humanity as a whole—who



not crush and throw away the shell in preserving the kernel—who did not suffer the tenement to perish in His concern for the indweller. The touch which brought sight, the word which banished fever, the robe that stanchd the wasting issue, proclaimed Jesus the “Saviour of the body.”

And is not that title vindicated when we see, as sometimes we do, the drunkard made sober, and the sensual chaste, and the dissipated steady and thoughtful, through the converting power of the gospel; and observe as a consequence, a ruddy glow coming over the once sickly complexion, and signs of robustness taking the place of invading debility? And is not Christ’s saving of the body a fact further illustrated and proved by the numerous hospitals and other homes of mercy which are world-known monuments of our modern Christianity?

Yet this province of redemptive power and love awaits its crowning revelation in the resurrection of the body at the last day. “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” is the wailing lament of the mourner, as he presses his foot on the yielding mould by the open grave, and looks over, with eyes full of tears, into

the gaping gulf which has swallowed up the coffined remains of some loved one. "In sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection at the last day," are words which faith can go on to utter respecting all who sleep in Jesus ; for every grave-yard shall be a place of victory for our blessed Lord, and over every Christian cemetery there shall one day wave a signal of triumph, like the flag which floats over the last tower or stronghold taken from the foe.

He is the Saviour of the body. It would be a wild fancy—an extravagant play of the imagination—to conceive, of the body being redeemed, while the soul was left to perish, of the outer robe of existence being cleansed and dyed with glorious hues, while the spiritual wearer was left to sink into endless perdition. Yet we do not feel that there is anything to startle us in the thought of the body being folded up and laid aside as a garment, while the immortal spirit which wore it is gone to put on another robe before the throne. Nought appears—looking simply at the reason of the thing—to prevent our imagining this severance of the soul from the body for ever. Yet the gospel assures us it is not so ; that the severance at death is not lasting ; and it further sug-

gests the idea that the two restorations, that of the soul and that of the body, are far from independent of each other ; rather that the one grows out of the other—that “the adoption, to wit, the redemption” of the body comes as the connected complement and crown of the restored soul.

Salvation is the subject of this part of the song of the flock, and I have dwelt upon the restoration of the body because this illustrates the restoration of the soul.

**I.** There are some minds which can get at truth **only** through figurative forms. They are dependent **on** imagery. Every thought shapes itself in metaphor. And even those who repudiate all poetry cannot get on without a measure of its help. The **most** abstract phraseology is not free from figure. Imagination, from the beginning, has been interwoven with metaphysics, and the greater part of the theology of the Bible has in it an element profoundly poetical.

Jesus Christ knows what is in man—knows best how to touch the springs of thought and feeling. And when He would impress on us the truth that

He came all the way from heaven to earth to rest the human soul, how does He do it? Not by plying what would be called a philosophical system, but by striking off the outline of a beautiful picture—really an expansion of the figure sketched in four words before us—*He restoreth my soul.*

“And He spake a parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.”

There, in the morning, goes the poor little wanderer, further and further away from the fold, heeding how the distance lengthens at every step which is taken by those rambling feet; over hill and dale he goes, through fields and forests, stopping to crop the grass, or to lie down under the trees. And now at length he is where no sight of shepherd and the flock is ever had; and as to the zig-zag pathway he has chosen for himself, it is

possible to remember its direction, and to retrace its windings. In the afternoon of the day, the shepherd counts his sheep, and misses one. Is it worth going after *one* out of a hundred? That watcher, with his all-comprehensive care, thinks so. Wrapping his mantle around him, and grasping his staff in his hand, he goes in search of the lost, over hill and dale, and through field and forest, till he comes, perhaps, to some thicket, where light flakes of wool, hanging on the thorn-set boughs, shews where the perverse little rambler has forced his way. Then how joyful is the shepherd's shouldering of the runaway, and how tender and strong the bearing home of the bleating one. So over and over again, amidst pieces of sculpture and rudely-drawn frescoes in the remains of ancient Rome, may you see the representation of a shepherd holding a lamb on his shoulders, and with its feet pressed against the bearer's bosom. The early Christians adopted it as the most appropriate emblem of their own restoration. Its frequent occurrence in early ecclesiastical art shews how the beautiful idea had burnt itself into the imagination of those delivered souls. How impressive the contrast in the Vatican Museum between the 750 heathen sepul-

chral marbles, without one word of hope, and the slabs from the catacombs, rudely chiselled, the inscriptions, badly spelt, but exhibiting such words as "*In Christo in pace!*" Christian hope confronts pagan hopelessness. A psalm of cheerful praise comes as an antiphone to the wailings of despair; and the emblem of a lion destroying a horse—a pagan type of power seizing on weakness, death fastening its fell teeth on life—only serves to set off the more strikingly the opposite figure of the sheep-carrying shepherd,—a type of power sustaining weakness, of Christ carrying through life and death the trustful believer, of Divine Love restoring the lost soul.

And further emblems of the restoration are supplied in the parable of the piece of money, and the prodigal son, and the whole of the 15th of Luke appears to me a pictorial comment on this verse of the 23d Psalm. The chain of illustrations, too, may be lengthened by dwelling on the healing restorative acts of the Saviour's miracle-crowded life. The narratives of the evangelists may be cast into links of strength and beauty, to be joined to those already wrought in the golden parables of

Christ himself. In that dark, film-covered eye, opened to see the light of heaven, and, what is better, the vision of the divine Healer—the light of life and the Lord of glory ; in that ear, a while ago silent as the grave, now ringing with the words “Ephatha—Be opened ;” in that tongue once paralysed and powerless, now vocal with devout thanksgiving ; in those feet, yesterday maimed and lamed, making the cripple a helpless object of charity, to-day moving with elastic step ;—in all these instances you see the healing virtue brought from heaven by the Son of God, to aching, poor, diseased humanity, point by point, from head to foot, “like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard, that went down to the skirts of his garment.” How it illustrates in detail the renewal of the soul, enabling us to make an analysis of the progress of individual salvation, the perception of the spiritual world restored—before, a blank ; the faculty of listening to the sound of the Divine voice in nature, in conscience, but, above all, in the Bible, restored—before, a realm of silence ; a tongue to praise the Lord restored—before, unused to the service of song ; and the power to walk in the



ways, and to work in the household of God, restored—before, crippled and gone !

And then, having dwelt upon the healing of the body piece by piece, go on to think of the single touch, “He took her by the hand ;” of the brief omnific word, “Stand still,” “Come forth,”—bringing back life at once to the damsel just dead, to the young man carried to his burial, and to Lazarus after four days’ slumber in the grave. Just think of these resurrection-miracles, these instances in which, in a moment, the lightning flash of the Lord’s omnipotence melted the chains of death, and revitalised the heart, and the blood, and the brain ; and as, in the former cases, you have the restorative process in analysis and detail, here you have it epitomised and condensed, flashing out in one great blaze of glory. Contrast the dead and the living :—the dead, all blind, and deaf, and dumb, and paralysed ; the living, with eye, and ear, and voice, and working power. Not less is the contrast between what man is before, and what man is after Christ restores him. No where do we read of any one going so far as to ask Christ to raise the dead ; but *you* are warranted to ask the Resurrection and the Life to look on your

poor, dead soul in its grave, or on its way to the burial, wrapped in its winding-sheet, and to save it. You are encouraged to cry to Him, "O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul;" for He is waiting to say of you, "Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom." To adopt the words of David in the light of these wonders, is to express the most wonderful truth that ever came within human knowledge.

According to the method we have followed, a lively impression of the soul's restoration rests on our thoughts as the proper result.

II. But are we to consider that we have exhausted the subject when we have caused our imagination to take in the force of the figure? Certainly not.

Go into the garden and look at your flowers. Take that rose or lily. Above ground is the stem, and there are the green leaves, and the brilliant white or coloured petals. But that which flourishes on the surface, in the open air, in the gladdening light, in the genial sun-warmth, is not the whole of the plant. Very much of its life lies beneath. To understand its nature you must search under

ground. You must *examine the roots*. A with truth. Figures such as we have select the flowers of truth. To understand the wh truth, you must inquire, as far as possible, in fundamental and naked principles of truth, w which figures would be no realities.

At the beginning, to go no further than t most remarkable truth underlies the peculiar p ology, "He restoreth *my soul*." "My soul" i in Hebrew as a periphrasis for "myself." " wilt not leave my soul in hell," means "Thou w leave *me* there." Communing with our "hear communing with ourselves. The "restoration soul," means the "restoration of myself." Do ar tily observe—Then what become of your deepsp significations? How do you uphold your disti between soul and body? We reply by going unfold our idea. In the Hebrew language the so the body are clearly distinguished, and yet the used to signify a man's self. Restoring the body, be restoring only a part of the man. Restori soul is the restoring of the man's self. And fore the great truth comes out here, that th which so many care little for—that the soul,

some of us play such sad tricks with—that the soul, which, perhaps, you are at this very time doing all you can to poison and corrupt, is really the core, the heart, the centre of your nature—your true and proper personality. The body is only a part of yourself, a minor part, the case, the shell, the husk.

I will take care of *myself*, says somebody, who is considered the very personification of prudence; and by that he means his health, and he buttons up his coat, and folds a comforter round his neck on a frosty night, ere he goes into the open air. I will take care of *myself*, says another man; by which he means his property, and well he looks after the pence and the pounds. But, in connexion with all this outward care, the soul, the proper self, receives not a passing thought, but is unconsciously undergoing a process of lingering suicide—of gradual impoverishment.

The care of our souls is the highest care of ourselves.

The restoration of the soul here so succinctly expressed, is the grand spiritual fact which the Bible is given to us to explain—*so far* as it is *necessary* for us to have it explained—in order that we

may experience the blessed fact for ourselves, in order that we may practically apply it to our own growing improvement—I say *so far*, but no further. Christianity, like nature, is a system only partially understood. It does not satisfy speculative curiosity. A very great deal touching—what shall I call it?—the *philosophy* of this restoration? (I do not like the word) remains unrevealed, and, of course, unexplained. Not only do figurative illustrations give you the mere first blush of truth—only the evanescent, perishing flowers which the underground roots from time to time send up and then cast off—but the most careful unimagined thinking gives us at the best ideas that lie a very little way below the surface; just the upper fibres of the deep-striking root. So much as we *can* know and *ought* to know, if we devoutly study our Bibles, God will teach us; but a very great deal more remains that we can never know in this world.

The doctrine of the soul's restoration may be put into a few words, in modern systems of divinity. How very imperfectly, however, a condensed theological proposition can convey an idea of spiritual truth, none but thoughtful people sufficiently appre-

hend. The doctrine now crushed into abridged formulas it took ages upon ages to reveal. David wrote this psalm years before Isaiah uttered any of those predictions of spiritual blessings, any of those anticipative histories of the Messiah's incarnation and death, or any of those warnings of dangers and calls to repentance, which altogether have justly won for him the title of the evangelical prophet. Others came afterwards, throwing more and more light on God's ways and purposes of mercy. And then, when seeds of holy thought had been sown, and buried for ages, the great Teacher appeared to instruct us more fully in the marvels of the great restoration. "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." "The good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." "This is my body which is broken for you." "This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you." And again—opening to us another side of the restoration—He says, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh ; and which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."

These are the two main lines of Christian teaching along which the thoughts of reflective disciples have been travelling up and down from the time Lord's words were uttered until now. All the rest of inquiry about the restoration of the soul branches off here. Under the one supreme Teacher, perhaps the three greatest are Paul, and Peter, and John.

Paul had thought much, through the teaching of the Holy Spirit, about laws and law, about Government of the world, about the obligation of duty, about the guilt of sin, and about the death that follows. So one grand view which he gives of the restoration of the soul—and he gives it to the Church at Rome, to the people of a nation who idolised law, and made a boast of their sense of duty and executed the penalties of crime with an intensity of severity—is, that it consists in a wonderful change of man's relationship to God's law, to God's government, to God's justice, to God's self. He proclaims the restoration of the soul as a being *justified*,

counted righteous before God. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." "Therefore there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Nor does he omit to take up the other view of spiritual restoration,—that of the soul being *sanctified*, made righteous in itself. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled *in* us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; *but* they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit."

*Justified, sanctified*—two words are these of convenient form and deep meaning, presenting ideas of the soul's restoration truly original. They have in them an unfathomable depth of signification for minds previously uneducated to perceive their import. Justification comes with a repulsive novelty before minds of a proud intellectual cast—the Roman understanding and the Greek reason. How



long it was after Paul was gone, before the *ful* thought conveyed by his word, *justification*, *came* to be embraced—before it was distinctly seen to *refer* to the relation of man to God, and his relation to *that* law which is the parent of every law, just and right! How long it was before that side of salvation *came* to be distinctly seen! Only faint glimpses of it *are* caught in the earlier literature of Christendom; and not till the Reformation was it made popularly *intelligible* and sufficiently prominent. The dream of Greek, with his transcendental philosophy, was *not* likely soon to grasp it; but it might have been expected to be otherwise with the practical, law-reverencing Roman. Yet he was slow to learn the truth. *And* still, how that side of salvation is, by many gifted minds, ignored, or dimly seen, or covered over with heaps on heaps of metaphysical dust! Does it not indicate that justification is not a notion which the world's sages would have lighted on, that it is a truth revealed to faith, and that it requires much schooling of the intellect and the heart before the one can see it and the other like it?

And as to *sanctification*—that, though earlier unfolding itself to the thoughtful consciousness of

the Church, though more luminously shining, as in the philosophical theology of the earlier ages, so in the philosophical theology of the present day—that, I say, though more germane to certain habits of thinking, more welcome to minds of a certain cast, is a wonderfully original idea, and goes deeper than any speculative musings could anticipate. The new birth of the gospel, the indwelling of the Spirit revealed by the gospel, the renewing day by day taught by the gospel, was a revelation of spiritual fact and doctrine most strange and mysterious to many a man trained in the schools of Greek and Latin learning—and is so still.

Immense are the obligations under which we are laid to the blessed Apostle Paul for these two broad treasure-bearing words—*justification* and *sanctification*. Yet let it not be forgotten how they may be abused, how they are used often as meaningless sounds, or as representatives of nothing better than hard, dry, logical formularies of metaphysical thought, related more closely to the schoolmen than to the writer of the Epistle to the Romans and Galatians. The coin of the realm may be as mere counters in the hands of fools.

Peter was another of the inspired shepherds who fed the flock with knowledge and understanding. A man of simple experimental views, of an eager, ardent, loving heart, he did not dwell so much, as did his "beloved brother Paul," on the change of relationship, on the work of justification, but directed his thoughts chiefly to the unfolding of that germinant thought in the teaching of Christ—"Born again." "Being born," says Peter, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God that liveth and abideth for ever." "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us *an example*, that ye should follow his steps. Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, *should live unto righteousness*: by whose stripes ye were healed." Thoughtfully read the two epistles of Peter, and you will see how the experimental and practical view of the restoration of the soul is the predominant one.

And then, last in this triumvirate of matchless teachers, comes "that disciple whom Jesus loved," whose thoughts revolved round two main centres—"God is light," "God is love." Illuminated by this light, purified by this love, he resolves the restora-

tion into the experience of a new and blessed fellowship with this Divine light and this Divine love. In other words, he resolves it into a restoration to Divine sonship—the bringing back of the prodigal to be more a son than ever, a son not only through reconciliation, but through renewed and inward resemblance. What a profound spiritual comment is the first Epistle of John upon the parable of the prodigal, and the words of the psalm—"He restoreth my soul!"

III. So, then, from all this we see the change involved in the restoration is double. Not only is the change in the soul typified by a change in the body,—not only is the restoration of the soul at present a sure precursor of the resurrection of the body at the last day,—not only in this sense is there a double transformation, an inner and an outer one,—but yet in another, and a still further reaching sense, is the change double, inasmuch as it relates to the soul's *circumstances*, and to the soul's *self*.

There are two classes of circumstances by which we are all surrounded. Temporal circumstances

comprise the outward accidents of man's present life ; spiritual circumstances consist of the relations in which he stands to eternity and God. The temporal surroundings are but as the little garden, with its gates and rails, around a shepherd's cottage ; while the spiritual are as the everlasting mountains, that gird the horizon and touch the heavens—or as the grand march of the seasons, now bathing the windows with warm sunlight, now pelting the roof with rain or snow. Changes take place in the outwardly temporal. It is just like altering the tiny garden ; the spiritual landscape all round is the same—the same dark hills, and the same cloudy heavens. Men rise from poverty to wealth, from obscurity to honour, but remain condemned by God's law, and subject to His righteous displeasure.

On the other hand, the outwardly temporal remains as it was. The dimensions of the seed-plot by the cottage door continue unchanged, but summer has followed winter, and the snows on the mountains have melted, and all nature has become another self, as seen in the golden and purple light of autumn's morning or eventide. And so a man may remain as poor as he ever was—as neglected as

he ever was ; but God is no longer angry with him—His anger is turned away, and the whole universe to him has become changed—life's prospects, and especially eternity's, are completely different.

And with this change in the soul's circumstances, there is a change in the soul's *self*. Whenever, wherever, however conversion takes place, this fact is found to constitute its essence. Old things pass away ; all things become new. I can conceive of a change by no means necessitating the departure of what is old. An angel may rise from rank to rank in the celestial hierarchies—may be promoted to a higher standing near the throne, and carry with him all he had, to receive fresh accessions of power, honour, and bliss. And when the saint dies out of this world, he takes up to heaven the spiritual life wrought in him here below by the Holy Ghost ; and the more perfect unfolding of that constitutes the crowning change in the history of his spiritual development. But the restoration of the soul in the new birth is the dying out of an old depraved and accursed life of selfishness and vice, as well as the kindling of a new one the very opposite. Regeneration is a putting off as well as a putting on—a renunciation as well as an

acceptance—an abandonment as well as a welcome—an end put to an old story, as well as the commencement of a new—a death as well as a resurrection. To profess that we have been converted, and then to carry over the border-land of the two spiritual countries the old habits that belonged to our Egyptian bondage, is to perpetrate a huge piece of hypocrisy, and to tell before God and man a most awful lie.

And under this double wonder, there lies a double miracle—even the incarnation of Christ, and the descent of the Spirit. For the incarnation of Christ was the groundwork of His life and death, His teaching and His miracles, His example and His atonement. In itself, in the simple fact of the Divine being made human, in the Eternal Word being made flesh, there was an unparalleled manifestation of sympathy and love towards those who needed to be restored, the irrevocable pledge that they should be restored. And was not that incarnation a miracle—a miracle out of which grew a miraculous life, and a miraculous death, and a miraculous resurrection—a *tap-root* miracle, out of which, like the branches and the fruitage of a tree, sprang all the

miracles that covered over His unparalleled history? I wonder not at any miracle which I read of in the Gospel, when once convinced of that primal mystery which stands recorded at the beginning of Luke and John. It is but natural, but a thing of course, that a series of physical wonders should spring out of the one seed of the spiritual wonder, when to restore the soul "*God was manifest in the flesh.*"

And the descent of the Holy Spirit is the secret of the moral renovation of individual souls. The new birth is a work of the Spirit; the progress of holiness is a work of the Spirit; the final victory over sin is a work of the Spirit; and fitness for final presentation before the presence of the Divine glory, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, is a work of the Spirit. And the descent of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, was not that a miracle—the most wonderful of spiritual miracles—not unfitted to come as the crown and reward of the mission which began in the Incarnation, and ended in the Ascension?

Nor is it to be forgotten that the double wonder of justification and regeneration in the case of each restored soul, is in truth a double miracle. Forgiveness is a miracle. It is a turning aside of the



common working of law in relation to the guilty; not so as to produce a disturbance in the great forces of the universe, but so as, through its dependence on the Mediator's work, to fall in and harmonise with the highest and most comprehensive of the infinite laws of Jehovah. And regeneration is a miracle for who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" With man it is impossible; with God all things are possible.

And finally, the Saviour of the body in the day of His flesh saved it by miracle; and the Saviour of the body at the last day will save it by miracle. A dispensation miraculously begun will miraculously end. May we speak of the whole as a wonderful exceptional instance, confirming the infinite and eternal rules of rectitude and order? The crown will be put on the head of restored humanity—the sceptre of power be given to its re-strengthened hands—and the robe of beauty and majesty be enfolded round shoulders, which shall bear up evermore afterwards the burden of blissful self-government, divine obligation, and human responsibility, without any sense of weariness, without one touch of pain.

IV.

The Restoration.

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"He restoreth my soul."—PSALM xxiii. 3.



Two of the most distinguished friends of freedom that England ever saw lie buried side by side in the grand old Abbey of Westminster. There, beneath the pavement which begins to gather gloom like the gloom of death, as the evening sun throws its last flash on the upper wall—emblem that of the Christian hope, which gleams gloriously over all Christian graves—there, under the broad old flagstones, furrowed with the tread of many generations—and to the spot all lovers of freedom will delight to come for ages and ages yet—there, mingles with that of kings, warriors, and poets, the dust of these two men. They did sway sceptres, but it was over minds; they did fight battles, but it was with the weapons of reason and eloquence; and their lives were episodes written in deeds, better than words. Many of you have paused over the graves of Fox and Wilberforce in the transept of yonder minster. Have you ever fancied a group of freed West In-

dian slaves gazing on those marble monum  
Would it not bring tears into negro eyes to  
of those who restored to them their liberty?

We have stood in Smithfield on *the spot* ·  
Rogers was burnt to ashes ; and by the M  
Memorial at Oxford, *built* near the place  
Latimer and Ridley were consumed ; and i  
churchyard of St Mary, Gloucester, where H  
body perished in the flames ; and we must ac  
ledge that a deep excitement stirred our heart,  
thought on the debt we. in common with all E  
men, owe to those heroic sufferers, for what they  
ed to us and our children, through their constan  
agonies—how they were the restorers of our *f*

One has sometimes placed in inagination  
the cross of Him who infinitely exceeds all  
benefactors, those who in the days of His mi  
had felt His healing power. Bartimeus with  
eyes, and the widow's son and Lazarus in the f  
of life, and the woman whose issue of bloo  
stanchd, and one out of the ten cleansd  
and a crowd beside, no longer paralysed, or  
with fever, or possessed of devils. How feel t  
they behold the Restorer of their *bodies* ?

The day will come when we who have experienced the redeeming grace of the good Shepherd shall stand, along with all the healed and strengthened ones, before the throne. And then, what joy and gratitude shall we feel, as each remembers his own story of saving love, his own deliverance from sin and death, and as each takes up the song of everlasting praise, and throws in his tribute of adoring acknowledgment, "He restoreth my soul!"

We have dwelt upon the character of that restoration in *general*, and have pointed out some of its doctrinal aspects. Let us resume the subject, and look at it in *particular*, illustrating it on the side of individual experience. And following our Master in His method of instruction, we will present our lessons in forms of imagery, borrowing them all from the Word of God. Metaphors are condensed parables, and here are some gathered out of the very psalms of which this twenty-third is so beautiful a specimen. He who here celebrates the restoration of his soul, illustrates it elsewhere as a deliverance from *Bonds*, *Imprisonment*, the *Pit*, the *Snare*, and the *Flood*.

*From Bondage.*

"Thou hast loosed my bonds."

I well remember seeing in the noble church at Nismes a pictorial illustration of the words, under the figure of a man with eyes gazing into heaven, and with arms outstretched in joy, while the shattered yoke and the shiveringly broken chains lying at his feet indicate the bondage out of which he came. Just picture that of the soul emancipated from bonds worse than were ever worn by the ancient captive or the modern slave.

There are bonds of *unbelief*.

Spiritual facts of infinite importance are set forth in the gospel. They are brought to light before us with a vividness which is irresistible by some strong principle of aversion rooted in fallen souls. The truth of who Christ, the Word of God, the redeeming agent, is the sum and substance, the centre and pivot—that truth, as stated in the Divine Word, realised and enjoyed by the obedient, is rejected by the carnal mind, but is suspected, questioned, set aside, and kept in abeyance, or is openly discredited and daringly trampled on. Its truth is attested

it is not believed. It comes with authority, but it is not believed. Its urgent claims are pressed, but it is not believed. Unbelief keeps the soul in bonds. It is a bandage over the eyes, a stoppage of the ears, a manacle on the hand, a fetter on the foot, and a chain round the loins of the understanding.

Unbelief admits of degrees. Indeed it may blend with faith, for you find it in renewed hearts, a weed growing amidst plants of grace. "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief," are words of prayer which may be appropriately used by others besides the father of the demoniac. But from those thrice heavy bonds with which the devil binds his slaves the regenerate are free. Once they were so blind that they could not behold the Lamb of God—so crippled hand and foot that they could not touch Him. That, however, is at an end. The hell-forged chain, which they without a murmur wore, is shivered to atoms, and they can sing, in the consciousness of new-found liberty, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid ; thou hast loosed my bonds."

There are bonds of *error*.

Inquisitive and acute minds are exposed to these. Where people have speculative tendencies, habits of



theorising, and a fondness for systems, there is danger lest there should come to be woven in their mind a web made up of cunning fables and of silky-looking lies. But even when threads are spun, and fastened to men's hearts, the Lord can and does wonderfully restore to the knowledge and enjoyment of truth, not by abruptly breaking the bonds, or burning them on fire, but by patiently untying them, unloosing one by one the knots, gradually unravelling entanglements, helping those willing to be so restored to see the truth, and explaining it to them. Error peels off and perishes, like wrinkled skin from healed wounds.

There are also bonds of *doubt*.

We mean by this, not any denial or any questioning as to the truths of the gospel themselves, but doubting and treading under foot the blessings they reveal. Immense disquietude and confusion are the result of doubts relating to our safety. "Am I a Christian? If I were so, should I thus and thus? Why this coldness? Why this lack of delight in prayer? Why such confusion of thought in approaching God? Why so

vancement in Christian holiness? Why still such a tendency to pause and listen to voices of temptation? O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" Under these spiritual circumstances, the Lord restores the soul to faith—to a state of holy and happy trust and confidence in His own precious love and care. The soul comes to see the truths revealed in the "glorious gospel;" it comes to see that there is a Divine Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep; it comes to see those pastures of living green, those truths and promises and hourly comforts with which the Scriptures abound; the soul comes to see the reassuring fact, that it is itself a sheep of the redeemed flock, in the omnipotently guarded fold, and that it may go in and out and find pasture.

*From Imprisonment.*

"Bring my soul out of prison," was the sad, bitter, yet not hopeless cry of the Psalmist, when he felt the wrongs of oppression and the injustice of his persecutors. Under convictions different, but as deep, do awakened souls employ such words. You have passed by county gaols, and have seen the mas-

sive blocks piled one upon another, with the iron spikes upon the lofty walls ; you have seen the dangling chains over the grim archways,—those strange, but expressive architectural ornaments over houses of captivity ; you have noticed pictures of old hoary fortresses in other lands, and have heard tales of dungeons where men have been cast down into deep cells on instruments of torture, there to writhe in agony, and to die of festering wounds and hunger. But a sense of guilt connected with God's wrath, the consciousness of spiritual misery, enfolding the terrific fear of eternal death,—that is far worse than any prison that was ever entered or ever seen in the most cruel country and in the most barbarous times.

The Christian knows that there is such a thing as guilt, because he recognises the existence of law, and has felt the workings of disobedience. He cannot separate the first idea from the other two ; and as, while looking at sin only in relation to himself, it strikes him as a wrong done to his own soul—a stain of dishonour on his own name—dwelling upon the thought of sin with reference to God, it strikes him as something more than that, even as the infraction of a Divine order, and an insult

to the Divine Majesty. So, it is seen carrying with it immense demerit, and involving a dreadful doom. The Christian knows that guilt is a Bible word, and that what it means is a fact pertaining to his individual history, until through grace there is spiritual restoration. He is conscious that there rests on him what is enough to weigh down his existence to eternal woe, unless rescue come from the hand of Jesus. And if we be in that condemnation, but one thing can save us. The mediation of the Son of God alone meets the necessities of our case, and that does it most completely. While with *my* hand I grasp *His*, let me remember that it is His, not mine, that saves. Christ's mediation redeems me, not the faith I place in Him. "*Thou* didst not abhor the virgin's womb. After *Thou* didst overcome the sharpness of death, *Thou* didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers."

Christ restores the soul to the consciousness of the favour of God—restores it by covering it with His own righteousness, and by filling it with the Holy Spirit. It is "made accepted in the Beloved"—justified through that ineffable union—sanctified in like manner too. Believe, according to the New

Testament, that this restoration is not fictitious—a mere change of names and outward relationships—a *calling* of the disobedient holy, of the depraved pure, and of the wrongful just; but a personal and inward change, the possession of a spiritual righteousness accompanying the imputation of the covering one. Never forget that the restored soul is made right both ways, morally as well as judicially, essentially as well as relatively. The prisoner of guilt not only leaves behind him his prison dress and prison chains, but he comes out cleansed from the pollutions of his cell, and cured of the old gaol fever.

*From the Pit.*

“He brought me up out of an horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, and set my feet firm on a rock.”

Did you ever look into the shaft of a coal mine, and notice, as the lamp went down, the glittering reflection upon the sides where the water was streaming from rock to rock? Did you notice at the bottom the miners flitting to and fro with their tiny lanterns, looking like so many fire-flies imprisoned in a cage? Have you in the Pyrenees leaned over the almost

perpendicular sides of the jagged rocks, and marked at the bottom the mountain torrent rolling in mad-like violence? Have you among the Alps stood on the edge of the gaping crevasses, or on the brink of the blue ice gulf?

Put together these elements of scenery, and strive to conceive of some abyss far deeper than any mine, and far more awful than any mountain chasm. Look down into such a gorge, and fancy a number of human beings sinking down from ledge to ledge, trying to keep their standing, but unable, till you lose them amidst the dense gloom that hides the bottom. That horrible pit is but a figure of human depravity.

I believe there is a sense in which every one is depraved before the gospel changes him; but we should contradict facts, if we maintained that before that change, all men are alike depraved. They may be honest and amiable, kind and frank-hearted, truthful and trustful. This should be recognised. We injure the interest of truth by not taking in the whole truth. Nothing is more likely to prejudice men against the doctrine of depravity, than to deal in exaggerated statements respecting it. The

existence of amiable instincts and social virtues is not inconsistent with the want of love to God. That want is the germ of all moral mischief. Scripture affirms that the carnal mind is enmity against God, and that affirmation ought to be conclusive ; yet we are bound to add, that so far as we can judge from observation and example, facts within and around us on this point are in full harmony with the Holy Scriptures. Surely we can apply to this alienation from the life of God no more appropriate term than depravity. A creature who does not love the Author of his being, and the Saviour who redeemed his soul, must be depraved indeed. And to be in that state, is to slip and slide and stumble in caverns of darkness, and the shadow of death, where the light is as darkness. It is to be kept away from the God of heaven—from the glory of His face—from the blessed air, the open fields, the bright rivers, and the heaven-touching hills, which belong to His free children.

But when restored there is an end put to the existence in the pit. The soul comes into a reign of purity and freedom. Led into the open day of regenerated life, to see and feel the Sun of righteous-

ness risen with healing in His wings—what a sense of liberty comes over it, and the soul can say, “I know that to love God is to be free, to enter His service is to be free, to live and work in His vineyard is to be free. I never knew what freedom was till now!”

There is a further sense in which the soul in many cases is depraved. It is often sunk in vice, in lust, in drunkenness, in avarice. In what appear to some the lowest depths in the bottomless pit of sin, there are yet lower. Oh the continued falling there may be in wickedness! How the soul may slide lower and lower down the muddy plane of rock which lines the sides of the great sin gulf! Thousands of people are sinking deeper and deeper into sin, descending from dissipation to the most loathsome lust; descending from indulgence in what is called mere tipping to worse than beastly drunkenness; descending from little tricks, which may be simply for the sake of saving sixpence, down to frauds that involve a hundred pounds and more; sinking from debauchery to murder, sinking from vice to vice, from crime to crime, until the young culprit finds himself crushed beneath a felon's doom.



But from points very far down the bottomless **pit** the Lord has raised many up. The sensual, **the** loathsome, in their own eyes, and in the eyes **of** others too, have been brought out, and washed, **and** cleaned, and set upon the rock. "The body of **sin** is destroyed, that henceforth they should not serve **sin**." Yes, destroyed, like the burning of filthy **rags** torn off the back of the poor wretch saved from **the** muddy waters of a fallen-in coal mine. And **is** it not a great joy to see the burning of the old **rags** after being clothed with a change of raiment?

*From the Snare.*

"Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped."

The busy malevolence of the archfiend is no fiction. He spreads out his temptations like nets, and men are snared and taken in an evil time. Seeing that the devil tempted Christ, we cannot wonder that he tempts the holiest Christian. That text, however, remains an everlastingly true one:—"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not

suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Vigilant and cautious souls shall never be entangled by the devil at all. But vigilance and caution are at times grievously intermitted, when "an hour of temptation comes on the earth." The bait is laid, the soul is decoyed, the net is concealed. Trusting to a lie, the man sins. Then all at once his eyes are opened—the snare is plain—the caught one becomes conscious of his capture; and there are struggles to escape, and sad, sad pain till the Deliverer appears. There He finds the guiltily foolish one, bird-like, fluttering and beating its poor wings, and getting more and more entangled in the twisted cords, the tiny meshes, and the intricate knots of the hell-spun web. He listens, He pities, He helps. Unfastening the strings of temptation, He sets free the panting captive.

What a picture that is of you, my backsliding brother, in your fall, and, I hope, in your restoration! You yielded to temptation. Escaped from the pollutions of the world, you have again become entangled therein. You are conscious yourself of

decline ; perhaps it is too obvious for others **not** to observe it. You **know** you are not what you **were**. You are not the same in your closet—you **are** not the same when you open the Bible—you are **not** the same in family prayer—you are not the same **in** the house of God, and at the Lord's table. *Ichabod* is written upon your forehead. You ought to **feel** deep sorrow and anguish. I hope you do. Do **you** sigh, "Oh that it were with me as in days that **are** past?" Like David, do you confess your sin? Like Peter, do you weep bitterly? Thank God, and **do** not despair. Struggle to get right again, and **look** at the Restorer. Resolve on reformation, and **look** at the Restorer. Resolve on revival, and look at **the** Restorer.

*From the Flood.*

"Out of the depths have I cried unto thee ; Lord, hear my voice." "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy water-spouts : all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me."

"As I was once sailing," says an old captain, "across the banks of Newfoundland, one of those heavy fogs which prevail in those parts, rendered

it impossible for us to see far ahead, even in the day-time; but at night we could not distinguish any object twice the ship's length. I kept lights at the mast-head, and a constant watch. The wind was blowing a smacking breeze. Suddenly the watch gave the alarm of a sail ahead! It was scarcely uttered before we were upon her. She was a small schooner at anchor; the crew were asleep, and had neglected to hoist a light. We struck her just amidships. The force, the size, and the weight of our vessel bore her down below the waves—we passed over her. As the crashing wreck was sinking beneath us, I had a glimpse of two or three half-naked wretches rushing from her cabin—they just started from their beds to be followed shrieking by the waves. I heard their drowning cry mingling with the wind. The blast that bore it to our ears swept us out of all further hearing. I shall never forget that cry. We put about—returned as nearly as we could guess to the place where the smack had anchored—cruised for hours—fired signal-guns—listened and listened, but all was silent. We never saw or heard anything of them more."

A ship vanishing under water—a little sea-world of men, and women, and children sucked beneath the waves—only a mast left, with the mains of handkerchiefs streaming from it, by which some of the crew had fastened themselves to prevent their being washed away—must be an awful sight as one ploughs along the high seas, as all sailors tell us that it is.

But the Bible gives us the history of a worse wreck. Even the loss of the *Great Eastern*, crooked from head to stern, would be less than the sinking of the tiniest nautilus, compared with the wreck of the days of Noah. The whole habitable earth—whole space of land, covered by cities, and villages and people—over-washed by swelling currents, huge gurgling whirlpools. Against the hills and rocks, as against the timbers of a big ship, the waters beat and foamed. Through them and over them they made their resistless way—tossing and scattering the whole furniture of civilisation, and cunning-handed men had made and carefully arranged—tearing up masts and mainstays, and the whole of the world's tackle of every kind—chasing after, and effectually overtaking,

mortal on board the doomed vessel—following up wherever they climbed, and forcing in wherever they crept, and sweeping off wherever they hung. Oh, there never was such a wreck as that! And then when the wild waters had done their worst—when the last expiring shriek of the last drowned man had ended, and all was silent again, and the great flood-sea was calm, and the stars and the moon rose up and shone upon the awful death-face of the world, or the morning sun broke out and cleared away the summer mists, and made the deluge look like molten gold, there was God's ship, the Ark—that never to be wrecked one, insured as was never ship before or since—floating on in wondrous majesty—type of the Church!

In some respects worse than a shipwreck, worse than the world-wreck, are the sins and sorrows of lost souls in this world, from generation to generation, lengthening out over long ages, involving millions more than ocean or flood could swallow up in a few hours or a few days. More terrible than the sensation of gurgling waters rushing in the ears, has been the consciousness of human minds drowned in the depths of spiritual despondency.

From the caverns of the great and the wide sea, where fleets are strewn in wild confusion, and where whole navies uncoffined lie, there is no deliverance. The diver may go down in his bell, and fetch up the stores and the timber ; but the dead ones must there continue to lie, in their sea-weed shrouds, till the heavens be no more. From under the sepulchral flood no victim could be lifted up ; and the self-destroyed antediluvian, clinging to the stern of the ark ship, would have found the deck inaccessible, and the cabin door shut by the hand of God. But souls can be raised from the ocean gulfs of sin and despair. If they be like Jonah, in his strange prison-house, surrounded by rolling waters, they may be like Jonah in his deliverance. There is escape, through infinite mercy, from their place of darkness, and there is room in the Ark of the love of God for a multitude that no man can number.

No restoration of drowned bodies is so wonderful as the restoration of drowned souls. It is said there is awful agony in being restored after suspended animation ; but the gladness must be very great when he who has been snatched from the river's bed is made conscious of his deliverance,

while embraced in the loving arms of mother, sister, child; and when, with restored strength, he walks again over the green fields, and lifts up his eyes to the blue heavens—a living, healthy man. And very deeply distressing may be certain stages of experience, through which lost souls have to pass—pangs of remorse may be endured more harrowing than any physical sensations, but when the process of spiritual reanimation is over, and divine life, and health, and gladness come out of the throes of repentance, a thankful song must burst from the rescued, like that of David, and ascend unto the ears of the gracious Deliverer—"He restoreth my soul."

The deliverance is not merely passive. No figures indeed can be employed too strong to illustrate the helplessness of man apart from God, and the sovereign efficacy of that grace which restores the soul. But He who gives us the parable of the lost silver and the stray sheep, gives us also the parable of the lost son, as if to shew that, while hopelessly lost is the silver and the sheep, until the Divine Searcher comes to find and save—in our salvation there must be on our part an active concurrence, and, like the



prodigal, we must arise, and come to our Father. The *personality* of man must not be forgotten—the mysterious power of human will and action must be taken into account. The restored soul itself believes, and trusts, loves, worships, follows, and obeys. You are not to wait till some miracle be sent to save you, in spite of insensibility and resistance. You may so wait till doomsday, when a miracle will indeed come to wake you up—but only to the consciousness of a vaster loss and a deeper perdition. Now cry to the Deliverer to have mercy. Now put out your hand to clasp His, already outstretched, and waiting to deliver.

Finally, the helplessness of man, apart from the gospel, without Christ and the Holy Spirit, is plain enough to all who understand what human nature is on the one hand, and the gospel on the other.

There is a class of writers in the present day, both in philosophy and fiction, and especially in humorous satire, who are abundantly clever in pointing out social evils and individual vices. In tracing the circumlocutions of fraud and avarice—in exposing huge outbreaks of commercial iniquity, and the

thousand petty heartlessnesses of daily life, which chafe and fret the sensitive—in shewing you what is hollow—in tearing to pieces what is false—in unmasking the revellers who go up and down the mad dances of the world's vast fancy ball—none so clever, truthful, and honest as they. But what have they done beyond that? They probe some of the wounds of humanity, some of its sorest ulcers, to the bone; but what healer do they tell you of? They are wonderful in the diagnosis of certain forms of moral disease; but where is *their* good physician—*their* balm of Gilead? In the secrets of the world's worst prison-house, they are versed enough; but what know they of a deliverer? Where is *their* key to unlock the world's dungeon door? Admirable destructives are they of shams and hypocrisy—busy kindlers of bonfires in which to burn the paper pretences, the red-tape formularies, and the lath and plaster ornaments of political and social craft; but they are utterly incapable of building up goodness, recreating virtue, and bringing back man to the service and love of the God of righteousness and truth. They tell you of no human restorer. They recognise

not the only Divine One ; and failing that, their exposure of evils, without the exhibition of any sufficient remedy, is very like tormenting devils before the time.

V.

Right Paths.

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"He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."—PSALM xxiii. 3.



TRAVELLERS of any experience know that it is a perilous thing to venture on mountainous regions without a guide. In one of the illustrated books for 1858, I find a narrative which illustrates this:—A young man, with his sister, was travelling in Scotland. They were tempted to ascend a hill, not often trodden by either natives or strangers, because boggy and pathless; “though tempting to the eye by its verdure, and by a grand pile of rocks which stood like a crown on the brow of the first grand ascent.” For a while they rambled together, when the daring youth parted company, that he might explore alone the wonders of the scene. He was climbing higher and higher, till, hidden behind a ridge, he disappeared. The young lady sat watching the sunset and the flight of an eagle, till night let fall its darkening curtain; she waited for her brother, but he did not return; she called out his name, but he did not return; she

waved her parasol, but he did not return; then rushing down to the inn, she briefly told her agony: "He is on the mountain there—he left me and **did** not come back—he said he should not be **gone** twenty minutes." A party went to search. It **was** a dark, cloudy night. The young man was **found** at the foot of a precipitous rock, with his **neck** broken. He would venture on unknown **paths** without a guide.

Every one who has travelled in Switzerland **and** the Pyrenees, will remember such stories of **rash** tourists who have fallen victims to their own folly.\* I well recollect some years ago crossing the Scheideck, and missing my way; I had lagged behind, fascinated by the beauty of the scenery, and **found** myself wandering upon the grass of a **trackless** portion of the upland. A pine forest concealed the path I should have followed, and also the party **with** whom I was journeying. Sad was the bewilder-

\* The author was painfully affected, during a tour in the Pyrenees since first writing this, with the additional illustration of his remarks, in the lamented death of Archdeacon Hardwicke. He will never forget his visit a few days after, to the Port de Venasque, near which that lamented clergyman fell, and to the lonely grave where he lies buried.

ment I felt for a little while, till, dashing into what I guessed to be a bridle road, I hastened on and joyfully caught sight of my companions toiling up the zigzag pathway.

It is infinitely worse to pursue the moral pilgrimage of life without a guide. Are you, my friend, alone this morning on the mountain of a new year? \* Guideless, have you been roving about till now? and do you mean to venture on another twelve-month of spiritual travel in ignorance of your way? There are perils enough all round about you—bogs, and swamps, and chasms, and precipices. It is a mercy you have not perished already; it is a mercy you are not lying now among the lost and mangled ones in the dark depths of the bottomless pit. By chance a man may get right who wanders over a mountain; but by chance you spiritual wanderers will never get to the holy city. Without a guide it is possible to cross the most dangerous Alpine passes in safety; not so with the moral life-journey. No Divine Guide, no security; no Divine Guide, no getting home.

But some rejoice in a Divine Guide; they can

\* This was prepared for the first Sunday morning of 1859.



join in the song of the flock, "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

*The Paths.*

The Lord can lead us in no other paths than such as He walks in Himself.\*

The paths of *creation* are all right paths. There is nothing crooked, perverse, or capricious in the laws of nature. Mathematicians have studied them, and they have, with one consent, pronounced them to be profoundly accurate. From the orbit of the outermost planet to the little wax cell of a bee, you have illustrations of algebra and geometry as exact as possible. Men of mechanical genius have studied the great planetary machine, the relation of its parts, and the law of its motions, and have shewn that no steam-engine was ever so ingeniously contrived, or any watch so delicately adjusted. Chemists have investigated what is hourly going

\* At the time I first wrote this, I was deeply interested in the reading of a discourse by my honoured friend, the Rev. J. Baldwin Brown, entitled, I think, "Right Paths." I cannot find it, but I suspect a comparison of my own thoughts with his, would shew I am his debtor.

on in the worlds of animal and vegetable physiology, and they inform us that no processes in any artificial laboratory are so perfect and wonderful.

You and I may not have scientific knowledge enough to detect and appreciate all the surprising phenomena in the ways of the great World-worker. We may only be able to see that it is all right on the *surface*; but patient, thoughtful men have told us a thousand times it is all right *underneath*.

To me it is a great encouragement and comfort to dwell on this fact, and to apply it to all mysteries in the Divine government; for I look at it thus: a human workman may have plenty of intellect, and may do things right skilfully, but his heart may be bad—what is morally wrong may in him be associated with what is mentally and mechanically right. But God is a perfect being *throughout*. There can be no inconsistency in Him—He is of *one mind*. The rectitude of His ways in the world of matter, is a pledge of His rectitude in all other ways. He who has nowhere made a mistake in His heavenly or earthly works, cannot make a mistake

in any of His moral dealings with the children of men. The lines He draws in nature, I am sure, can be no straighter than those He draws in moral law, in providential discipline, in religious principles, and in the processes of His sovereign grace. "As for God, His ways are perfect." "The ways of the Lord are right."

The paths of *providence* in which God walks before us are paths of righteousness. People never question it, when He goes before them in the glow of sunshine, dropping rich bounties every step He takes. You do not hear rich folks exclaiming, "How mysterious are the ways of providence!" Youths of health and vigour, mothers surrounded by happy children, are not startled at Divine dispensations. But when the Lord walks before us covered with clouds, and a rod in His hand—when He stops and turns to smite—when we feel the bruise, and the heart bleeds, how common then to talk of "mystery!" And yet, when we take our character as sinners into account, there is really much more of mystery in the prosperous, than in the adverse events of human life—in wealth, than in poverty—in health, than in sickness—in peaceful rest, than in

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painful labour—in the sparing of our comforts, than in the taking of them away.

In whatever way the Lord is going before you now, His way is not only a right one because it is expedient for your good, and will yield you benefit at last; or because He has a complete proprietorship over you, and may do what He will with His own; but it is absolutely, constantly, and without exception, a righteous one. It is one worthy of Himself, as the infinitely excellent and unspeakably holy Lord God Almighty—one which in no step taken can ever deflect from the line of perfect rectitude—one in which there are no haltings nor digressions for the sake of advantage in some onward stage—one in which evil is never done that good may come—one which, if you could see it just as it is at this moment, you would be constrained to confess to be thoroughly right—one which, if by an incredible supposition it were now to end, to be cut off in the midst, would be found to involve no injustice, to leave ground for no reasonable complaint.

The paths of *duty*, too, in which God would have us walk before Him are paths of righteousness.

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They are perfectly straight. Some interpreter ~~is~~ anxious to maintain the integrity of the poetic ~~figure~~ figure, do not admit that the word "*righteousness*" is here used in its *moral sense*, because they think that would be an inartistic blending of the real and metaphorical. I do not think the sacred writers paid so much attention to critical laws of composition as some suppose. I have no doubt that "*righteousness*" here is to be taken in its moral sense—that the Psalmist drops the image for the sake of the *substance* of the image.

Yet, never forget that the paths of God presented for you and me in duty, are just as straight as the paths in which our Holy Father walks Himself through the glorious fields of nature, and along the highroads and byways of providence. The paths of Christian righteousness, of Christian faith, and obedience, and self-denial, and purity, and truth, and honesty, and love, are all straight.

They run parallel with *the laws of the whole outer universe*. To violate laws of temperance, laws of chastity, laws of truth, is like running across a railway when a train is rushing onward. No strong wild horse so strong and wild. If men will cross the rails

when an engine is coming, they must expect to be crushed, and they are crushed ; and if men will cross over God's lines of moral order, it is the same. Keep parallel with the railway, and the steaming traffic will not hurt you ; and keep parallel with God's straight line of holy law, and you will escape all the mischiefs that come on the heads of transgressors. Mind *all* God's laws—mind them wisely, mind them well—and you will be sure to discover that in a wonderful manner the physical works along with the moral, yielding you health, not disease—strength, not weakness—pleasure, not pain. Long life was promised to the Israelites as a reward. Long life is promised as one of the privileges of the millennium. I believe that obedience to all God's laws has a tendency, natural and not arbitrary, in that direction.

They run parallel with *the laws of our own being*. We sometimes speak of human nature, and of God's moral laws, as if they were at cross-purposes. We ought to distinguish between nature and the corruption of nature, to understand this matter rightly. The truth is, that what we often call human nature is a departure from it. It is nature thrown into confusion. It is nature turned upside down. It is

nature rent and torn, not by what it contained at first, but by what the devil crushed into it at the hour of the fall. The tempest and the earthquake arise from laws *in* nature. The convulsion in *humanity* through sin is not the effects of what was originally *in* nature, but of what was injected afterward. Temptation presented to man was accepted by man. Sin suggested by the devil was made Adam's own. So now nature is corrupt: it is diseased, sore, and full of wounds. It is the corruption of human nature, not human nature itself, that is opposed to the laws of God; just as disease, not the body, is opposed to the law of health. *Here* is the antagonism. The cross-purpose lies *here*. The laws of God cannot be opposed to the nature of man. Bring back human nature to what it was in Adam, or rather what it is in Christ, and then all the principles of our being will be found running exactly level with the laws of Divine duty. Our conscience will be sure to say, "These spiritual laws of the Bible are all right;" our reason, enlightened and wise, will not wish the commands of the gospel to be otherwise than they are.

They run parallel with *the interests of the eternal*

*future.* Sin runs across those interests. Do wrong in whatever way you choose, and you injure your prospects for eternity. Every act of disobedience tends to damage your final welfare. Let a man live and die in sin, and there is nothing but hell left for him. At autumn rubbish must be burnt. You sweep it together in a heap, and set fire to it, that you may get rid of it, and clear your garden of the incumbrance. What a terrible lesson of warning there is in that little incident of horticulture? Souls that become like the dry, dead, rotten leaves and weeds and refuse of the summer are only fit for fuel. But you gather up the seed—you garner up the precious grain; and God will garner up holy souls. Can you wish Him to garner up any other? See the eternal lines of safety, peace, and joy running on to heaven's gate—running over hill and valley, through field and forest—how straight, how secure, and strong the fences, and how unmistakeable the roadway! In the paths of righteousness, evangelical Christian righteousness, you are within the lines, and it is as impossible for you, so walking, to miss the celestial gate, as it is for those otherwise walking to find it.



*The Guidance.*

It is *Divine*. HE leadeth me. He, who **has** made me one of His flock through His redemptive power. He, who, through Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant, is ever to His people a covenant-keeping God.

His character is a pledge that He will lead me right. I know that I can trust the righteous Lord. I can trust Him with my soul and my body—with the whole of my circumstances, prospects, condition, and destiny. Swiss guides bring you books full of certificates and recommendations from persons whom they have diligently and carefully served, and, being strangers to you, you need from them a testimony to justify committing yourselves into their hands along unknown ways, where your safety, humanly speaking, depends on their experience and character. But when the father, who lives in that picturesque chalet, and is familiar with every peak and crag for miles and miles round his romantic home, takes his little boy by the hand to lead him up the steep side of the pine-clothed valley, the fresh little fellow, who has known that father's face since ever he knew any thing, and felt his love since ever he felt any thing,

needs no written papers to convince him that he may safely trust that honest hand. And the Divine Guide needs no epistles of commendation to or from his poor earthly creature. His *Name* is enough—FATHER! For His Name's sake, you may trust all to Him, without the shadow of a suspicion. Yet all who have followed His guidance can and do testify respecting His strength, His care, His love. What an interminable list of names there is of those in heaven and on earth who delight to proclaim, in songs of adoring praise, the matchless guidance of Him who leadeth us in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake!

It is *individual*. He leadeth *me*. We must not lose sight of the flock as a whole. What a flock it is!—how much more numerous and wider spread than bigots and sectaries believe! I see them, scattered over many lands, feeding on many hills, bearing many marks, following many different kinds of under-shepherds. *Before* us they go. What crowds of redeemed ones following the one Shepherd up the hills to the living pastures! And *behind* us they come. What multitudes of converted souls yet to be gathered, whom the glass of pro-

phesy and promise gives us distinctly to behold  
And what an assemblage it will be when all are  
gathered into the final fold on the heights of the  
Delectable Mountains yonder! But while I would  
not for the world lose sight of the flock as a whole,  
I am constrained to appropriate the comfort of  
the individual application of the Divine leadership  
and protection. He leadeth *me*. All the millions  
of Christ's people can make that blessed individual  
appropriation of His care. That poor old woman  
can—who, living in her solitary cottage on the moor  
as the winter snow-storm loads her dilapidated roof  
and the wind makes the ill-glazed windows rattle  
replies, as one asks her, "My good woman, are you  
not afraid to live here all alone?" "No, sir; Love  
shuts my door at night, and Mercy opens it in the  
morning." That repentant prodigal can—who  
having wasted his substance in riotous living, and  
is now in shattered health, with an empty purse  
and earthly prospects darkened for ever—while he  
may truly complain, "No man careth for my soul,"  
can nevertheless add, "Yet the Lord is my helper."  
That little child can—who, with strangely busy  
thoughts, feels that older people cannot understand

him, but alone with his Bible, and in his bed-room, on his knees, can talk, in his own childish way, to the Shepherd, whose will it is that not "one of these little ones should perish." There is a world of beauty in the word "*me*," taken in this connexion. The individual atom, no less than the huge universe of matter, the tiny fire-fly, no less than the blazing sun, the snow-flake, no less than the crimson cloud that stretches over all the west at night-fall, are upheld by the one Hand, to whose fingers great and little are just alike. And so it is in God's providential and gracious care of "the masses of the population" and of individual souls. The God of the hills, and of the ocean, and of the globe, and of the stars, and of the skies, is the God of the dew-drop. And the Head of the Church, who has ruled all the millions of its hosts—who led Joseph like a flock, and gathered together the outcasts of Judah, and converted the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, leadeth still every trustful soul "*one by one*."

And when these two are put together—"He," an infinite, all-controlling spirit, and "*me*," a free agent, having individuality, thought, desire, and will

—when we connect *His* leading and *our* being led, His protection and our safety—how many thoughts do they suggest! Take two:—

First, How manifold are the methods of His leading! It must be so with a wise father towards different children. It will vary according to the progress of Divine dispensations. David was led by the law of Exodus and Deuteronomy, and by all that was peculiar in the providential discipline of a Jew's life, a shepherd's life, a chieftain's life, a monarch's life. But you are led by the gospel of Jesus, and by circumstances and influences belonging to England and the nineteenth century. Time's clock struck yesterday a later hour in the world's long day than David ever heard. And God guides you according to your occupations and circumstances, and the age in which you live. The leading, too, will vary according to the varieties of human nature, physically and mentally. It will also vary according to age and circumstances. What suits the little child does not suit the old man; and the method of leading one year may not be adapted to the next; and the way, though one, may sometimes be bright and sometimes dark. Sometimes He may speak, and you may not feel His hand. There may be

a sense of duty without the enjoyment of consolation. Sometimes you may both hear His voice and touch His arm. You may walk in obedience, and joyfully stay yourselves upon your God. Sometimes you may feel yourselves to be in silence and darkness. Yet He, the Invisible, is guiding you still.

Secondly, How mysterious is the innermost secret of His leading ! We speak of His leading us by the voice of His word, and by the voice of His providence, and by the voice of nature, and by the voices of other souls, and by the voice of His Holy Spirit. These particulars are intelligible, and these distinctions proper ; and between the first and last together, and all the rest, there is a marked separation to be made in all Christian thoughtfulness upon the matter. The Bible teaching is a particular, and special, and unique kind of teaching ; and the Spirit's teaching, in reference to all believing souls, is in connexion with the Holy Word. The Spirit of Christ takes of the things which are Christ's, and shews them unto us. But, after all, do not the other influences blend with these ? and are they not all taken up, by the comprehensive agency of Divine power, into the grand redeeming and sanctifying process by

which God prepares for Himself His own elect? How much comes from one? how much from another? Where are the boundary lines of influence? Whom shall say? When we speak of the voice of reason and of the voice of the Spirit, or of the voice of conscience and the voice of the Spirit, what mysteries underlie our words, and how utterly impossible it is exactly to discriminate between what we mean by one voice and what we mean by the other! There is a sense in which all that is truly natural is also divine. And also, there is an exercise of spiritual power that is divine far above all that is natural. But who shall disentangle these delicate threads of divine action, and determine where they unite and where they separate? And the regal work of the Holy Spirit controlling and securing the effect of all the others, what mortal can explain the depths of that? "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and ye hear the sound thereof, but ye cannot tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The bird's song is a mystery. Man's voice is a mystery. The thunder of the gale is a mystery. But the greatest mystery of all is God, speaking so as to guide a soul.

Having meditated on the Paths and the Guidance,  
we advert to

*The Reason of both.*

The apostle Paul, describing the humiliation of the Great Shepherd of the sheep, says, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for *your sakes* he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." And again, "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, *but made himself of no reputation.*" Those wonderful words tell us of the perfect unselfishness of our Divine Shepherd, of His disinterested love and care, and His unparalleled self-sacrifice. Yet it is true "He leadeth us in the paths of righteousness for *His name's sake.*"

Let us turn to two or three passages in which we read of the name of God: "And they said unto Joshua, We are thy servants. And Joshua said unto them, Who are ye? and from whence come ye? And they said unto him, From a very far country thy servants are come, because of *the name* of the Lord thy God: for we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt." And Solomon, in his dedication prayer, says, "Moreover, concerning



a stranger, that is not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for thy name's sake; . . . hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and do all that the stranger calleth to thee for, that all people of the earth may know thy *name*." And Isaiah speaks of God's leading the people "by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting *name*." In all these cases, the reference is to a manifestation of God—a revealing of what He is—of His power, justice, wisdom, and love. Hence, leading in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake, must mean His doing this that He may reveal Himself to His people—that He may manifest to them His perfect attributes, so that they may know Him—and that through His shewing forth His glory unto them, they may, through devout obedience, glorify Him.

*For His name's sake!* You must separate from your thoughts on the subject all idea of selfishness. So far as any advantage is concerned, *that* accrues to you, not to Him. His object is to give, not to acquire—to pour out of His fulness, not to gather into His treasures.

*For His name's sake!* You are taught to remember that in all His ways to *you*, as well as in all His ways to the whole universe, He is revealing Himself, shewing you more and more of what He is, unfolding to you the riches of His goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering. Every dispensation of providence in your daily life, every gift, restraint, and impulse, every lesson and precept of the gospel, however brought home to your heart and conscience, is a revelation of God to *you*.

*For His name's sake!* You are shewn that the reasons of His conduct are to be found in His own infinitely perfect nature—in that Divine reason, conscience, and heart, from which all the holy thoughts, all the right sentiments and principles, and all the pure affections of all creatures, whether they be men or angels, originally flow.

*For His name's sake!* You learn finally that the glorifying of His name is to be the object of your obedience, your righteousness, your conformity in all things to His own will. The spiritual attainment highest and most difficult to us is, to be good, not for our own sake merely, but for God's. Simply to do a right thing is easy, compared

with the doing of it from a principle of love and devotion to the Divine Being. And yet till we so do right things, what is our virtue worth? How much of our morality and religion is selfish at the bottom! The rebuke to the Jews is applicable to Christians: "Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?"

Let us study the example of Daniel, in whose prayers we see the man, the unselfish patriot, the God-filled saint: "We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, *for thine own sake*, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by *thy name*." See what honour God puts on those who honour Him — what a name He gives those who work and pray for His name's sake: "And behold a hand touched me, and he said unto me, O Daniel, *a man greatly beloved*."

## VI.

### The Valley of Trouble.

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"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil : for thou art with me."—Ps. xxiii. 4.



It is very cheering to look out from dark scenes, to bright ones—to stand by the boundary of a dismal pass just crossed, to catch views beyond of meadows, orchards, and corn-fields, the pleasant village, the well-provided homestead. And so, as we emerge from life's great troubles, it inspires wonderful buoyancy to lift up our eyes to behold some contrast of relief, and deliverance, and enjoyment.

On the other hand, it is salutary to anticipate perils ahead—to look from sunny heights to gloomy vales—and to trace the windings of perilous rock-paths, and the narrow unrailed footway on the edge of a road, overhanging a gulf it makes one giddy to pry down into—and to observe well, and to prepare with caution to cross, the frail bridge, whose time-worn posts and planks are visibly trembling under the tread of a few sheep passing from one side to the other of the brawling stream. Care, preparation, and confidence will follow from a pause, spent in thought-

fulness, expectation, and forecast. And in the moral pilgrimage how much more needful still is it to anticipate danger, and by trust and prayer to prepare for troubles inevitably certain! Natural reason and spiritual faith are given us that we may thus look *before*, as well as *after*.

The song of the flock hitherto, has been one of joyous experience. David, embodying in his lay the glad trustfulness of the Church, exults in the manifested presence of the Divine Shepherd. It has been hitherto all sunshine with the Singer of Israel; his eyes have rested on a landscape full of plenty, the earth at rest and in peace. The scene changes now to THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

I do not know what local imagery David called to remembrance when he wrote these words: whether the *shadow* came from the frowning precipices which shut him in, hiding the sun and darkening the sheep-walk; or whether it came from some incident occurring there, some lion or bear threatening his father's flock, or some Sabeen robbers wheeling near with felonious intent, or some lightning flash, some fire from God, which seemed as if it would burn the sheep and consume the ser-

vants, as in the case of Job. However it might be, no matter ; the words have become a framework, in which all kinds of frowning landscapes can be set, and each one of us may draw upon the resources of his own memory or imagination, for the form, the colour, or the shading of the typical Death-valley.

Crossing the northern Alps, the traveller comes upon the *Via Mala*, one of the grandest gateways into Italy, where the lofty rocks stand like towers guarding the entrance, and jutting masses form broken segments of an arch, and tunnels run through the heart of the everlasting hills ; and gigantic beeches, and tall, straggling pines cling to the scanty soil, fighting daily for existence with the floods and winds ; and the ascent to the Splugen goes zigzag, commanding a long succession of rude and savage views, while the tourist, watching there the young river of the Rhine, sees it dashing on with terrific energy, with floating firs, entangled in the narrow channel, breasting the rapids like brave sufferers in the midst of their calamity.

Coming up from the Tyrol to the pass of the Stelvio, you enter the gorge of the Finstermünz,



where the river Inn has rent in twain the slate rocks, and has smoothed them by flowing on century after century, leaving above the huge deep drain which it has scooped out for itself, grim, beetling crags, which nearly touch. It is a valley of the shadow of death indeed ; and to heighten the terrific associations of the spot, as one toils up the steep sides of the mountain, there, in the narrowest portion of the upper defile, is planted an Austrian fortification, bristling with cannon, and shewing many a loophole for the discharge of musketry.

Climbing over the Pyrenees into the sunny vales of Spain, we meet with a strange, wild region in the valley of Gavarnie ; first a roadway no better than a narrow shelf, cut out of the precipitous mountain walls, myriads of trees crowding the other side, and then a labyrinth of blocks and landslips, piled one above another, through which even the muleteer finds it hard to pick his way. He calls it Chaos.

It is no arbitrary employment of the fancy to call such pictures typical. The words of David imply that scenes in nature have a moral use. Throughout the Bible they are so employed. And it is vain for the most sternly unimaginative to contend

ist an instinctive tendency of the human mind  
 ve spiritual meanings to the works of God.  
 , the innate poetry of the Pyreneese shepherd,  
 the Tyrolese huntsman, and the Alpine drover  
 in the very names they have given to familiar  
 , stamped on them the marks of a mystic sym-  
 m. The scattered boulders are recognised as  
 of other confusions worse than their own ; and  
 loomy overhanging walls of slate are felt to be  
 another sort of sadness. And who can miss  
 moral of the *Via Mala*—the *Evil Way* ?  
 admire the indefiniteness of the Psalmist's words  
 the obscurity of his allusion, because it gives  
 for Christian reflection, in the lights of Bible  
 and religious experience, to use the passage in  
 any ways. Let us refer to three valleys—*tem-*  
*!* trouble, *spiritual* conflict, and *death*. We  
 ae ourselves now to the first.

### *Trouble.*

e image will serve to embody any specific cala-  
 recollected, felt, or in anticipation. Luther, in  
 omment on the verse, remarks, "as once our  
 is wandered in the valley at Augsburg." Augs-

burg had been a vale of terror to the Saxon Reformer and his companions, when Melancthon went to the famous Diet in that old German city, to submit to the assembled princes and nobles a confession of the Reformed faith. It is said of Melancthon, while drawing up the paper, "Often did he weep over the page—often did he complain, with sentiments of genuine humility, of his own incompetence." The "Augsburg valley" was to Martin Luther a critical instance of the worst kind of trouble on earth. Preeminently had it darkened his spirit, and made him, like Moses, exceedingly fear and quake. So he put down this in his commentary as a representative case; meaning, doubtless, that it should cover all the examples of trouble that could enter his house at Wittenberg. Every man, like Luther, has the shadow of some great sorrow cast over his spirit as he reviews the history of the past, or ventures on a prophecy of the future. There is a dark valley of some kind not far off any of us.

People meet with sad *reverses* in their circumstances. Riches take to themselves wings and fly away. Job, when his property was stolen and destroyed, and his house blown down, entered the val-

Habakkuk was in it, when the fig-tree did not  
 om, neither was fruit in the vines, when the  
 r of the olive failed, and the fields yielded no  
 , and the flock was cut off from the fold, and  
 herd from the stall. Men fail in business.  
 st speculation is unsuccessful. Times change,  
 old commerce runs into new channels. A bank  
 is. One with whom you have trusted your all is  
 d. Nobody can be insensible to this kind of  
 : It is an idle dream to fancy Christians quite  
 ved by such calamitous circumstances. It is  
 r they should feel. "My son, despise not thou  
 hastening of the Lord." Trials of a pecuniary  
 may place a good man in such a position that  
 unable to meet his obligations—incapable of  
 ying just demands. Through the dishonesty of  
 ier, he may himself come to *seem dishonest*.  
 ribly painful position that! Any one is to be  
 y pitied who comes under the imputation of  
 nour, while conscious of rectitude. And here,  
 e way, I would remark, that it is only to such  
 les as are not our own fault, but the imposi-  
 of the Divine hand, that we may apply the  
 ipatory language of the text. It is foolish and

impious to indulge in any idea which could be translated into words in such a way as this, "Though I walk in the midst of troubles of my own creation—though by wandering from the paths of wisdom and rectitude, I fall into danger and sorrow, I will fear no evil." I would add that where persons rush into tribulation, and involve themselves in difficulties by departures from righteousness, their first duty is to repent, and to endeavour to retrace their steps. The hope of Divine protection is delusive in the case of a man who is carrying into his plans and thoughts of the future an evil conscience.

The best of men at times suffer in *reputation*. All bold spirits in public life, who are battling with the evils of society, and are seeking to accomplish real reforms, are more or less tried after this fashion. They can scarce fail, however discreet, to make enemies. Their work is necessarily in a measure destructive, and woe to them when the axe they impartially handle smites the root of some corruption, under which a neighbour has long nestled. Nor are quiet, harmless people always safe from suspicions, misjudgments, and even open reproaches. It must needs be that offences come

If the Master's good was evil spoken of—if He was called a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners—we can none of us wonder at having laid to our charge things that we know not. Light, however, is the burden of this sort which some have to carry; and yet perhaps they fear much evil from the strife of tongues. A whisper against their fair fame provokes them beyond endurance—the faintest spot upon their mantle, as they walk in white, irritates them with what they fancy to be a virtuous indignation. “Hush,” says the meek Shepherd to those over-troubled ones; “‘Consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.’” Sometimes troubles that we think very dark are truly but *shadows*—shadows in another sense than David's were. And if in the gloomy glen, even at the midnight hour, when not a star shines, we are not to mistrust our Shepherd, shall we tremble at a passing cloud—at a few summer rain-drops?

There is a mysterious kind of affliction called *nervousness*. Like some other names, it is one which serves to cover our ignorance. The specific cause

of the mental depression who can tell? But effects of that unknown cause—the awful gloom the very shadow of death cast over the thoughts and feelings, the terrifying aspects under which the past, the present, and the future are contemplated, the strange suspicions and prejudices harboured, the alienation which takes the place of love, the phantasmagoria which pass before the imagination, the fictitious woes bewailed, the painful gratuitous forebodings so wilfully cherished, the heart-crushing burden of the whole—their effects are sadly familiar to not a few. The patient so afflicted, often fails to meet with the sympathy which is his due, for it is known that he attributes to sources which are imaginary the troubles he complains of. But we should remember that whatever the cause, and whatever the mistakes respecting it may be, “the heart knoweth its bitterness.” Sorrow may be deeply real when according to the sufferer, comes from what we know has no existence. Do not many of our troubles with which the most numerous among us plague ourselves, arise from what in the estimation of the All-seeing can have no real existence? E

very shadowy must many of our afflictions look in the eyes of God! And yet on that account, He ceaseth not to feel for us: "He knoweth our infirmities." And, therefore, by the wisely-loving, sympathy will not be denied to poor nervous people, whose minds are like a camera obscura, reflecting all things upside down.

The argument we sometimes hear against the troubles of the nervous, is almost as foolish as the imagination of causes on the part of the sufferer. To contend against such a disease as, after all, an unreal thing, as a phantom which may at pleasure be dismissed—a spectre obedient to the human will—is to be profoundly ignorant of human nature, which has ever had cruel masters of its own creation to tyrannise over it for a hopeless time; and to be forgetful of the fact that more than half our apprehensions of outward things are fashioned and coloured by subjective influences—that every man's world around is very much the reflection of the world within. It might appear as if such cases as we now advert to, did not come within the range of our subject, inasmuch as the nervous affection settling on the mind paralyses all its powers, and renders



the victory of faith impossible. But do not let us too hastily assume that; for do we not all know what it is to experience within, the existence of a *double self*—a twofold mind with opposite tendencies—the one side faithful to reason, the other led captive by fancy—the one true to the truthful, the other the sport of falsehoods? Do we not know that success has often crowned the persevering efforts of reason and faith? and in the worst of the struggle, when the dark power has been uppermost, has not the better spirit been able to say, “Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me?” Is it not still possible, in the most mysterious of the death-valleys through which a mortal has to go, for the spiritual portion of our nature to rise superior to what is physically diseased and intellectually bewildered—to discern the blue sky over the black gulf—to recognise the one real presence in the land of shadows—and to say with calmness, (a rapturous confidence under such circumstances is too much to look for,) “I will fear no evil: for thou art with me?”

Another thing men dread is *pain*,

"My bones waxed old"—"I am full of tossings  
 o the dawning of the day"—"My sore ran in the  
 light"—"There is no soundness in my flesh"—"I am  
 feeble, and sore broken"—"I water my couch with  
 my tears." Old cries are these, belonging to Hebrew  
 times, which He who putteth our tears in His bottle  
 has recorded in His Book, in order, doubtless, to  
 shew us that when prostrate with disease and tor-  
 tured with pain, no strange thing has happened  
 unto us, and that He who has written all this in  
 His book of remembrance, is not one who cannot be  
 touched with the feeling of our infirmities. They  
 are cries proceeding from those upon whom that  
 same Lord, in His righteous and wise discipline, had  
 laid the rod of bodily pain—severe pain, long con-  
 tinued, hardly ever intermitted pain—like Robert  
 Hall's, whose life for years was protracted torture;  
 manifold, complicated disorders, increasing from  
 youth, and attaining almost insupportable burden-  
 someness in later age—like Richard Baxter's, who,  
 in the catalogue of his maladies, seems to include  
 almost all the ills which flesh is heir to. They can-  
 not fail to bring the shadow of death over a man's  
 soul. Not only are they the precursors of death—

the clouds which betoken the coming of life's last and most awful storm, but they have in them, to many, what is worse than death itself. I have known good men not at all afraid to die, but still they have been afraid to suffer. Like their patient Master, who had been drinking all His days of bitter cups, and who, when the last was before Him, prayed, "Suffer this cup to pass from me"—they have found the remembrance of pain endured insufficient to strengthen them for the agonies they anticipated. "I am not afraid to die, but I am afraid to live," said my friend Dr Morison, who had been for years a martyr to all kinds of physical suffering. He was waiting to be clothed upon with his house from heaven, yet he groaned, being burdened. The thought of more pain was too much for one already "in stripes above measure."


Yet faith can rise triumphant over pain and fear. You have seen the statue of Laocoon, with all his muscular energy, all his gigantic strength, yet crushed in the fatal coils of the sea-born serpents; and you have heard of the infant Hercules, who strangled the monsters that crawled into his cradle. And so, when mere natural courage has quailed, succumbed,

and died away under the fierce assaults of physical suffering, a heaven-born faith, though in the infancy of its spiritual life, has sufficed to grapple with, and has even cast away triumphantly, the depression and the dread of pain. Martyrs have called the blazing pyre "a bed of roses." And dying saints, without the excitements of confessorship, with none to watch them but *two*—their Father in heaven, and, next to Him, the one on earth most dear—have, in the silent chamber, calmly borne pangs of torture, perhaps equal to the bursting rack or the blistering flame. The evil once so feared has at last been little felt. The bitterness of death has been passed before death itself has come.

There is one more evil to be noticed—*bereavement*.

"Lover and friend," said David, another time, "hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness." What a tried man he was! Bereavement came nearer home. God smote his little boy. He was very ill. All the palace was in excitement. Was not the mother—with what strange feelings!—watching by the bed of the smitten one? And "David besought God for the child; and David

fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth. And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them. And it came to pass on the seventh day that the child died." But worse was it far, when another son was stricken, not with disease, but by the hand of violence, in the paths of rebellion. "And the king said unto Cush, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Cush answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is. And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" A valley of the shadow of death it was indeed to David, both those times. And bereavement always is. Not only is it so when the fell stroke takes away those we love, under circumstances that aggravate the loss—when some cruel accident cuts short their days, carries them away as with a flood—or when they have died in sin, like Aaron's sons—or when they have perished by their own hand—but even when under cir-



circumstances of the most desired mitigation, their heavenly Father has removed them to Himself, quickly, with little pain, and in the presence of their friends, in hope of the resurrection to eternal life. Even that was the shadow of a dark grief which rested over the home of Bethany—when Martha and Mary sent the messenger to Jesus, saying, “Lazarus is dead.” And ever most mysterious and saddening to the heart is the gloom which pervades the chamber where, on the bed surrounded a few hours before by ministries of skill, and care, and love, lies in loneliness the wasted form, under the awful winding-sheet, which you reverently lift up from the calm face, as if fearful of disturbing those slumbers which you know will last till the heavens be no more. And the shadow of that solemn loss follows you from room to room—walks with you by the way—meets you in the public place of concourse—is with you in the morning as soon as you wake—and never leaves you in the silent night. It makes the brightest places round your dwelling dark, while it renders the dark ones darker. Who has a garden where the roses look as fresh and smell as fragrant, while a corpse lies confined in the house, or has been only

just carried to the burial? O death, death ! there are no smoky shadows so blinding and stifling to us who live, as fall upon us when we see others die ! The loneliness which comes upon our spirit as we part from others at the gateway of the grave, can be cheered by one presence only. I never feel my need of God and Christ more than when I have bid good night to the dear pilgrim who has started on his wondrous journey to the spirit-land, and has left me standing on this side of the door which has closed on him for ever, and will soon open upon me.

*Comfort in Trouble.*

“Thou art with me,” O Father ! as *the Lord of providence*. “*With me !*” Filling all space before worlds were made, He fills all worlds that His fingers have formed ; and He fills all souls with whom those worlds are peopled ; and in Him we live and move and have our being. “This presence of the Lord,” says Luther, “cannot be ascertained by the five senses, but it is seen by faith, which is confident of this, that the Lord is nearer to us than we are to ourselves.” Yes ; He is the light of our light, the life of our life, the soul of our soul.

We do not live in an orphan world ; and while Providence takes in the whole compass of human affairs, embracing all the events which happen in the histories of men of every kind, we are taught in the Bible that there is a *speciality* in the Divine watchfulness over His own people. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous." And this *speciality* in point of *observation*, if we may so speak, is connected with a speciality in reference to *direction* and design, which we can better understand. "All things work together for good to them that love God." "Thou art with me," are words which, on Christian lips, and pondered with Christian intelligence, mean, "Thy gracious providence is so directing all the affairs of Thine unworthy servant, that however dark and distressing my circumstances may sometimes be, they are in Thine hands instruments of discipline, by which my soul is to have wrought out within it the highest good. What men call comfort, is a temporal good Thou mayest deny to me ; but holy conformity to Thy will—the most perfect good of all—that Thou art promoting by all the afflictions of my earthly lot." And it is not in prosperity that we realise the doctrine of Divine



providence ; it is in adversity. Not on the mountain, but in the valley—not in the sunshine, but in the shade, do we especially and most deeply feel the intimate presence of our heavenly Father. Blessed compensation for the loss of other comforts ! Have we not heard of good people who have said, on the review of tribulation, that they would thankfully pass through it all again, for the sake of having once more, to the same extent, a sense of the nearness, and the protection, and the favour of God ?

“ *With me !* ” And filling all time — Lord of the ages — Guardian of the successive generations of His people, He has been with them all their days, and will be evermore. The vessel of the Holy Church, that strong-built, storm-defying vessel, which has survived so many disasters, carries on board the souls of all God’s elect ; and each one, as he has looked on the waste of waters at the stern and head, has caught up as watchwords what the Psalmist said — “Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.” Abraham, as he stood upon the deck, and looked up to the starry heavens, in the still night, heard a voice saying, “Fear not ; I am thy shield and thine exceeding

great reward." And his grandson Jacob heard, years afterwards, the promise, "I will be with thee whithersoever thou goest." And to Moses, and to Joshua, and to many more, as they watched and thought, were like voices of comfort sent. The old mariners have fallen asleep long ago. But still the vessel sails onward, bearing a precious freight of souls; and as the great ages of the Church, and the little ages of its individual members, roll away, still are the eyes of the Lord watching, and the ear of the Lord listening too, and the hand of the Lord overshadowing the heaven-bound ship, and all its passengers.

"Thou art with me," O Christ! as a *Friend* that ticketh closer than a brother. God was in Christ—in Christ; not *learning* sympathy from a union with human nature, but *declaring* it. Not to *know* the feeling of our infirmities was God manifest in the flesh, but to express what was already known—to tell the affection already possessed. He was *touched*," and therefore He came down to tell us so, in the significant acts of His incarnate life.

Art thou in the valley, my brother, amidst poverty, and perhaps want? The Son of God is with thee there, to tell thee that He knows well enough

what it is to be poor, for He had not where to lay His head. Art thou misunderstood, suspected, prejudged, maligned, crushed under a load of calumny? The Son of God is with thee, to tell thee that He knows well enough what it is to be reviled and persecuted. Art thou the victim of a mysterious depression? comes there over the valley where thou art toiling on, a horror of great darkness? The Son of God is with thee, to tell thee that He knows well enough what impalpable sorrows and —griefs of the spirit, such as hard minds can never enter into, *agony, loneliness*. Art thou in pain The Son of God is with thee, to tell thee that He knows well enough what that is, and then He shew thee His hands, and His feet, and His side. Art thou bereaved? The Son of God is with thee, to tell thee that He knows well enough what bereavement is. He points to Bethany, and the grave of Lazarus.

“We have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted (or *tried*) like as we are.”

“Thou art with me,” O Holy Ghost, the Comforter! as a *sanctifying Spirit*. The Holy Ghost accompanies the dispensation of providence. The Holy

it reveals and applies the sympathy of Christ. Holy Ghost makes our pilgrimage through Valley of the Shadow of Death, the means promoting our purification and holiness. He is darkness light about us—opens our eyes to the truth in times of trouble, as we do not at other times. Mere trouble will not purify hallow. There is nothing in poverty or sickness to regenerate or revive a human soul. Circumstances and sensations will not create spiritual life and principles, but truth will. And in the Spirit leads us to think of truth, to live in the midst of truth. Windows are opened into the unseen, and we see its vanities—into heaven, and we see its attractive splendours—into the grave, and we see that there is nothing to be afraid of there, if we sleep in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit revealed to us, in their relation to our troubles, we are impelled to kneel down and pray, that though our much tribulation we may enter the Kingdom. And so the Holy Spirit sanctifies us as we pass through the valley.

Truth is tried by trouble; and in that trial, much more precious than of gold that perisheth, the

Holy Spirit strengthens our convictions of God's faithfulness and love. When all is prosperous, we *ought* to have strong convictions of that fact. But have we? The faithfulness and love at work behind our manifold blessings, creating them and bestowing them, are too often hid by the very profusion of bounty which they bring—like

"The pleached bower,  
Where honeysuckles ripen'd by the sun  
Forbid the sun to enter."

But through trials the Spirit lays *bare* to us the perfections of God. When we are far away from the golden harvest and the purple vintage, and there are round us only rocks—black rocks, slippery and precipitous—what can we do but look about for the arm of God? And when we look for it, we are sure to find it.

Patience is tried by trouble. Trouble does not create patience, but gives occasion for its exercise, and tests its power. It is hard, sometimes, not to complain. Patience is put into the furnace, as a hand into the flame. The soul must have a calm, strong will to keep holding it there, at God's bidding, unmoved. But the Spirit who has wrought

in us faith in God, thereby nerves the will to heroic endeavour, and the soul can stand face to face with terrific dispensations of Providence, and say, sincerely, "Even so, Father ; for so it seemeth good in Thy sight."

Love is tried by trouble. Abraham knew that, and so did David, and so does Christ. And even the little child smarting under the rod, or crying over the last task, feels that not without a struggle can love get over the stumblingblock of correction. And a victory follows the tiny battle so fought in life's earliest tide, when the little fellow, fresh from chastisement, and with sorrow for his fault, throws his arms about his mother's neck, and kisses her for very joy because now she smiles. And how love overflows a Christian's heart when, after patient endurance, he can say, "Though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and now Thou comfortest me!" The trouble, too, that tries the Christian's love, strengthens it ; for the Spirit teaches him that "whom the Lord *loveth* He chasteneth."

And love to our fellow-creatures is even more strengthened than tried by trouble. How it softens

the heart, breaking up and melting away that icy crust of insensibility to other people's calamities when we have none to mourn over of our own. The care for others, which Jesus brought to all His afflictions, we learn to get out of the experience of ours. And in after life, the Holy Spirit makes the memory of our sorrows the root of our sympathies. And so He sanctifies us as we pass through the valley.

## VII.

### The Valley of Conflict.

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will fear no evil : for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy  
staff they comfort me."—PSALM xxiii. 4.





WHILE any great affliction may be called "the Valley of the Shadow of Death," the image is singularly applicable to those phases of human experience when some *spiritual* trial of faith and patience overtakes a Christian pilgrim. Poverty, sickness, bereavement, and the like, are shadows on life's path ; but there are blacker ones in the history of spiritually-minded men. People of faith and prayer meet with causes of anxiety and terror, more dreadful than any outward circumstances in the present condition of existence.

The realisation of the spiritual world in its awful aspects—on what I would call the night-side of eternity—is to minds of a certain order most painful and distressing. This valley is the more appalling for its being impalpable. It is a pathway of the soul. One is haunted by the mysteries of evil. There is the consciousness of being on the edge of

perilous wonders. There is a persuasion of the presence in God's universe of that which makes faith stagger, and would overwhelm it, were it not for counter and consolatory persuasions. When we have an unusually deep impression of the prevalence of sin, of the power of temptation, of the nearness of satanic agencies, of the sorrow they have occasioned to the saints of God, of the mischief they have done to souls, of the many strong men slain by them, of the multitudes of victims who have gone down to hell, of their present and eternal misery, of their kinship to us as fellow-beings, and their relationship to God as His offspring,—when these facts are deeply impressed upon our minds, we get amidst the very thickest shades of “the Valley of the Shadow of Death.” It is a wilderness, a land of deserts and pits, a land of drought, a land that no man passeth through but of necessity. It is infested with satyrs and dragons. There is in it a constant howling and yelling, as of people under unutterable misery, and bound in affliction and iron. Over that valley there hangs the discouraging cloud of confusion; death also doth spread his wings over it. There are deep ditches, dangerous quags, into

t, if even a good man falls, he can find no  
 m for his foot to stand on. The pathway is  
 narrow. One is liable to fall on this side or  
 at. The causeway is sometimes so dark, that  
 you lift up your foot to set forward, you know  
 here or upon what you may set it next. The  
 h of hell is hard by the wayside. Flames and  
 e come out in abundance, doleful voices are  
 , rushings to and fro, as though the pilgrim  
 l be torn in pieces, or trodden down like the  
 of the streets. For miles they are heard, and  
 anies of fiends come forward to meet the tra-  
 . Nearer and nearer they come, and will get  
 d, and step up softly, and whisperingly suggest  
 us blasphemies.

Bunyan describes it. This wonderfully strong  
 graphic language points to no visible state of  
 s, nor to any mere temporal troubles and  
 ws, but to what is present before spiritual  
 s, when their faith in the mysterious aspects of  
 niverse is most sensitive and excited. The  
 rse is seen to be haunted with evil. There is  
 ess in the universe—there are devils in the  
 rse—there is a hell in the universe. And yet

the universe is the dominion and the creation of God. What an unutterable mystery !

This valley must be passed through—the dark side, as well as the bright side, of truth must be looked at. There are difficult things to be believed as well as easy ones—what is baffling as well as what is plain. We are to believe that there is sin as well as goodness, that there are devils as well as angels, that there is a hell as well as a heaven, that there are lost souls as well as saved ones. God does not give us an even path and a green carpet to walk upon all the way to heaven ! The road is not lined throughout with beautiful palaces and arbours, and Delectable Mountains on the horizon.

Now, awful views of the spiritual and eternal world are likely to come just after severe temptation. When a Christian has been fighting with Apollyon, when the great dragon has been unfolding his wings, or when the devil has been flattering the soul and undervaluing Christian service, and pretending to be good, and kind, and generous, and dwelling on the perilousness of the lonely pilgrimage, and pleading infirmities against the believer, ending all with some desperate outburst of rage—

striding over the breadth of the way, threatening to "spill the soul"—hurling darts of flame, like hail, till the Christian is almost spent—then there follows a walk through the valley. Reflections on such experience can scarcely fail to place us amidst manifold spiritual difficulties. We wander amidst close girdling rocks, deep hemming gulfs, and low hanging clouds of mystery—mystery—mystery!

Because of the report of this gloom, and of the terror which has seized on some who have touched its edge, men are tempted to turn back from the heavenly path leading through it. But faith in what lies beyond should animate to perseverance; also, there is a pathway through it; and to go back is to plunge into actual despair.

Let us touch on—

*Alleviations vouchsafed to terror-stricken*

*Pilgrims.*

1. If the memory of recently permitted temptation may in some cases open the entrance into this valley, there are other associated memories in the mind of the Christian which largely tend to mitigate his trial. To adopt the imagery of dear old

John Bunyan, the pilgrim was prepared for his conflict by the arms given him out of the Lord's armoury. Harnessed from head to foot with what is proof; only having *no armour for the back*, but well defended on the breast; wherever else wounded, no weapon has been allowed to pierce the heart. And when the enemy thought he was sure of his prey, and was going to fetch what he counted upon as his last blow, Christian could reach out his hand for the sword of the Spirit, wherewith to give the Evil One a deadly thrust. And have not his wounds been healed? Came there not a hand with some leaves from the tree of life, the which Christian took and applied to the wounds he had received in the battle, so as to be healed immediately? Did he not also sit down in that place to eat bread, and to drink of the bottle that was given him, so that, being refreshed, he could address himself to his journey with his sword drawn in his hand? The remembrance of spiritual help and comfort in connexion with spiritual temptation does not, I am aware, explain the mystery of evil. The experience of Divine consolations by Christian men will not be, to one intellectually perplexed with the darkest of problems, a

sufficient reason for the Divine permission of temptations which sweep over the whole world, and carry away multitudes of souls as with a flood. But still, the recollection of personal relief in the midst of temptation must serve to lighten the pressure of the great burden on individual minds ; and these particular instances of succour and assuagement must also appear to us as threads of light gleaming across the dense mystery, awakening the hope that one day the whole will be dispersed.

2. And when we are in the very midst of the trial, there is consolation to be derived from listening to the voices of those who have gone before us here. You hear in this psalm the words of one whose life becomes dim as he walks into the deepest shade, but whose voice falls triumphantly on your ear, "I will fear no evil; for thou art with me." David the hunted outlaw, and David the insulted king, felt in his own soul at times what depressed him more than exile amidst the caves of Engedi, and banishment at Mahanaim. Was he not thinking of something worse than the treachery and savage violence of mortal men, when he complained of water-floods, and darkness, and the terrors of hell? Can you read



the Psalms without feeling that David knew a little of the *night-side* of the universe? But in his deepest sorrow and trouble he cries, "O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." And the jubilant tone in which he finishes some of those psalms which are fullest of mourning, lamentation, and woe, may well inspire us to press forward through the densest gloom, hoping for the outbreak of light and gladness before long.

In later times, more precise utterance has been given to the painful pressure of the mystery of evil, its origin and prevalence, and with the voice of complaint there are coupled tidings of a remedy. "Did not my God," asked Augustine, "who is *not* only God, but goodness itself, make me? Whence, then, came I to will evil, and not good? Who *engrafted* in me this plant of bitterness? If the devil, whence is the devil? If he was transformed from a good angel into a devil by his own perverse will, whence came that will?" Here is the heart and centre of the difficulty. Here the dark valley is darkest. How Augustine warred as he there staggered along! God only knew, he says, the intensity of his sufferings. Though he never found any ex-

planation of the great mystery, yet he attained to peace through a steady apprehension of the limits of human knowledge, and through trust, childlike trust, in the infinite goodness and perfection of Him who has revealed Himself to us through Christ. In his "Confessions," what cheering words fall from his lips as he walks the valley, and tells us, "It is no thing to see from the summit of a woody mountain the house of peace, and finding no way thither, vainly to try to reach it through impassable thickets, while the lion and the dragon are besetting and lying in wait for us ; and another, quite another, to keep on the road that leads thither, guarded by the are of the celestial Captain, where no deserters from the heavenly army are permitted to lurk and rob."

We see Luther, and Bunyan, and Foster, and others, going down into the depths of the valley ; although persecuted by terrifying thoughts, they were not forsaken, though cast down, they were not destroyed. As with the Slough of Despond, so with this valley, they struggled through, and came out on the side nearest the heavenly city. "Many are the fictions of the righteous ; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all."

3. But, after all, the grand consolation is—"Thou art with me,"—the God of love.

But how is the love of God to be seen in the Valley of the Shadow of Death? Christian, when on the Delectable Mountains, holding the spy-glass which enabled him to see the goodly prospect, felt his hand tremble at the thought of what he had escaped. "I might have been down there in hell now," is a flash of terrifying truth even at the moment when a pilgrim on the sunny hills takes up his telescope to look at heaven. But when freed from the trepidation incident to a sense of personal danger, there remains the fact that multitudes of human creatures—our brothers and sisters, and God's children, too—are in the blackness of darkness for ever. Do arguments for the Divine benevolence, founded on certain beneficent arrangements of creation, appear, when that shadow falls on my spirit, complete, satisfactory, convincing? Do they crush objections? Do they silence all doubts? Is there enough in nature and in providence to satisfy the cravings of the sorrow-stricken soul for relief and comfort? It must appear to every one that we want something besides what we see, and what reason tells us, to keep

alive in our hearts, a conviction that "God is love." We have it. That truth is not a summing up of nature's and reason's teaching—it is the summing up of the gospel of redeeming mercy. It is not the expression, in a succinct formula, of the conclusion at which the naturalist arrives—not a proposition resting on scientific proofs. It does not send us to the constitution and history of the world, to pick up evidences and illustrations of what it declares ; but it is itself an authoritative revelation of love—the key to explain the purposes of all other things, however perplexing.

God's Bible meets us in the valley, and it does not paint the universe as a paradise. It is not a book of sentimental poetry. It does not ignore what many religious people seem to shut their eyes upon. It does not paint life on holidays and festivals alone, but life as it is on other days. It never irritates the chafed and grieved spirit of the sincerely doubting man by one syllable of unreality. It faces the darkest facts—*sin* and *death*, the *devil* and *hell* ; and it implies that good men may be and are terrified by the thought of them. Yet it goes on calmly saying, in the pitchy darkness of the deepest portion of the

valley, "God is love." And well it may, for it reveals the great fact which settles for ever the main question—"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through him." That is conclusive. Should it be objected that certain signs of beneficence in the natural world are not conclusive, because there are other arrangements involving the necessary endurance of pain, no such an objection can be put in here. Whatever difficulties I might feel as to a person's intentions, if I saw him making provisions on the whole beneficial, but yet allowing much scope for misery—I could not possibly doubt his disposition, if I further saw him making the most costly sacrifice possible for him to make, on behalf of those very persons for whom his provisions were contrived. A sacrifice leaves no doubt of the love of the sacrificer. Who can question Abraham's love to God? God has made the greatest sacrifices for man. He has given His Son. He has given Himself. I do not want proofs of His love for me after that. I cannot yield to any questionings about His love after that. I am prepared to look calmly on all facts in the uni-

verse, even the most terrible, after that. I am quite sure that whatever there may be in a creation which He has made, and which He overrules, there can be nothing inconsistent with love after that.

4. And as to my own personal safety amidst these realms of mystery, I can have no doubt of that while clinging to my Shepherd. The way may be sometimes very narrow and slippery, scarcely affording foothold, and the enemies of my soul, like dogs and wolves, may bark and howl ; but He can guide me amidst perilous precipices, and beat off the enemies of my soul. When I slide, He can recover me from the slippery rocks—when my feet are entangled in the brushwood of bewildering mental temptations, and, when actually tripped up, I am near being precipitated into the depths of some horrible gulf of doubt and agony, He can with His shepherdly crook lay hold upon me, and lift me up again, and make me stand and walk along the narrow way of simple truth, with a calm conviction and a steady hope. And when hellish beasts of prey gnash with their teeth, and open their jaws to bite, and foam with rage, and crouch with feline cunning to take a fatal spring, the Shepherd with His lordly staff

can smite the furies, saying, "Down, down!" and, like frightened curs, they quail and whine, and sneak away. "His rod and staff do comfort me."

*The Differences which obtain in reference to this stage of spiritual experience.*

1. There is a sense in which every thoughtful Christian has to pass through this dismal valley. The dark facts in the universe are too prominent to be overlooked by any but the very unreflective. We must at times have solemn thoughts as well as cheerful ones. Whatever God sees and permits, we are to try and behold in the light which He affords us for the purpose. Difficult truths are salutary trials of faith. To believe that God is love in the house Beautiful, and in the land Beulah, is not so strong an exercise of it as to believe the same thing down in the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

Bright truths look brighter when standing out on the back ground of dark ones.

Holiness looks the more beautiful in contrast with sin.

Christ's work appears most glorious when seen in conflict and victory over the devil and hell.

Guilt and perdition illustrate by contrast the love of redeeming grace.

There is a vast difference between passing through the valley and dwelling in it, between seeing it as the road to hell and the path to heaven.

The remembrance of it is calculated to chasten the Christian mind throughout the remaining pilgrimage, and is full of wise discipline, training the soul for the mountain-land of light and joy.

And, finally, in no hour of depression, nor in any exercise of speculative thought, must anything be admitted into our theories of present and future, time and eternity, earth and hell, incompatible with the perfect goodness of the Shepherd of souls. At the end of every article and clause of our creed, let there be the proviso and condition, *Saving the righteousness and the love of God.*

2. But all do not pass through the valley in the same way.

Men of strong but simple, trustful faith, so well described by Bunyan, have been like the brother hero who said, "I had sunshine all the way through the Valley of the Shadow of Death." Sunlight in the valley—that is, a sense of mystery without any



sense of desertion. What a comfort! And Christiana had visions of Jacob's ladder, and a present of a golden anchor, and a sight of Abraham's sacrificial knife, just before she came to the place. Some believers have such pleasant and beautiful impressions of Divine truth, and are so filled with the conviction of the nearness of heaven, and get such hold on hope, and have so much of self-sacrificing confidence in God, that they can walk through deep mysteries with composure and boldness. They have not strong, masculine minds, and their habits of thinking have not been broad and deep. They take the truth as little children, all on trust from the blessed Book, and find uninterrupted joy and peace, or nearly so, in believing. They are not much haunted by the mystery of the origin and prevalence of evil. They shed the radiance of their own tranquil souls over all nature, and when a difficulty obtrudes itself, they pass it by with an unhesitating conviction that what they know not now they will know hereafter. Thrice happy ones! How do the souls inured to conflict, and wrapped sometimes in blackest shades of doubt, envy those shining ones! And beyond all contemptible hypocrisy, is the hypocrisy of those

e intellectual people, who, from a wish to spiritually heroic, affect a conflict with and mysteries all to them unreal, and only by hearsay.

some even of the most reflective people, of it minds, are so humble and so patient, and ch great-hearted guides and comforters, that ape much which others meet with. When les are beginning to threaten, they are won-supported, and use words such as the alle-its into the mouth of Great-Heart—"Indeed, doing business in the great waters, or like own into the deep. This is like being in the the sea, and like going down to the bottoms ountains. Now it seems as if the earth with were about us for ever. But let them that darkness, and have no light, trust in the f the Lord, and stay upon their God. For , I have gone often through this valley, and en much harder put to it than now I am ; t you see I am alive. I would not boast t. I am not mine own saviour. But I trust ll have a good deliverance. Come, let us r light to Him that can lighten our darkness,

and can rebuke not only these, but all the Satans in hell."

Again, when some very timid soul passes through, there is a special check from the Lord of the way, and a command from the demons not to meddle with the fearing ones. They have no inclination to go back—that they abhor; but they dread lest the spirits of darkness and evil should have them, and shew such timidity as might encourage the enemy to make a fierce onslaught. But no. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." There is One mightier than Satan and all his angels. "This," says Great-Heart respecting Fearing, "I took very great notice of—that the valley was as quiet when he went through it, as ever I knew it before or since. I suppose those enemies here had now a special check from our Lord, and a command not to meddle until Fearing had passed over."

I love to read David and Bunyan together; for two souls, they were very much alike. Bunyan in old Hebrew times, upon a throne, would have been like David; and David amidst the Puritanism of the

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teenth century, would have been like Bunyan. The people of Israel would have understood many a passage of "Grace Abounding;" and the author of "Grace Abounding" found, we know, his own Cardiphonia in the utterances of pain, and grief, and faith, and hope, contained in the Book of Psalms. Study, then, with the *night-side* views of the universe and of man suggested by the awful words "Valley of the Shadow of Death," the pages of the immortal story where such a scene is painted, and pray, in the hour of temptation and terror, for the light and comfort which Christian and the other pilgrims

forget, that there is another valley hard by the one we have pictured forth, and that as we have the one, so shall we have the other. It is the Valley of Humiliation, fertile and green, and adorned with flowers, where the shepherd boys have a merrier time, and wear more of heart's-ease in their bosoms, than he who is clad in silks and velvet. Come and look at it in beautiful contrast with the Death Valley. It is refreshing to think of these bright spots in spiritual history, these rich and beautiful scenes in the regions of experience.

“In this valley our Lord formerly had His country-house : He loved much to be here. He loved also to walk in these meadows, for He found the air was pleasant. Besides, here a man shall be free from the noise, and from the hurrying of this life : all states are full of noise and confusion ; only the Valley of Humiliation is that empty and solitary place. Here a man shall not be let and hindered in his contemplation, as in other places he is apt to be. This is a valley that nobody walks in but those that love a pilgrim’s life. And though Christian had the hard hap to meet here with Apollyon, and to enter with him into a brisk encounter, yet I must tell you, that in former times men have met with angels here, have found pearls here, and have in this place found the words of life.

“Did I say our Lord had here in former days His country-house, and that He loved here to walk ? I will add, in this place, and to the people that live and trace these grounds, He has left a yearly revenue, to be faithfully paid them at certain seasons, for their maintenance by the way, and for their further encouragement to go on in their pilgrimage.”

The happy, contented walkers here have light and comfort in the midst of spiritual conflicts.

Most true is it, that they who delight in this place find a home in it, get best through the valley joining it. The man who kisses the very flowers which grow there, is the man for whose sake our Lord puts a check upon the enemies in the darkest dreary passages of religious and theological mystery. Pride aggravates what is mysterious. It creates difficulties which but for it would have no existence. It encourages a bold curiosity to look down into depths which make one giddy. It tempts upward to subterranean passages of speculation, where the daring searcher is sure to lose himself. Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." But, on the other hand, humility prepares us for the sight of the mysterious through it we trustfully lean on the arm of Almighty love, and keep the narrow footway which the gospel has built up through the whole length of the dark cavern. "God resisteth the proud, but he giveth grace to the humble."



## VIII

### The Valley of Death.

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"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy  
staff they comfort me."—PSALM xxiii. 4.





we surveyed the Valleys of Trouble and of  
t; we now approach the third and last—

### DEATH.

us think of it.

a valley very *dark* and *repulsive*.

re *may* be in connexion with death linger-  
sease, acute pain, nervous debility, depressed

a stroke of paralysis, or a rush of apoplexy.

*must* be the breaking up of this mortal body,

lling down of the old tabernacle in which we

welt all our lives. A traveller likes the tent

ich he has been eating, drinking, reading,

ng, talking, sleeping, for months and months.

yard of the weather-stained canvas is precious ;

e pilgrim soul, how can it help—from associa-

zen were it from no other cause—liking, fondly

the body, the tabernacle in which it has ever

nd moved and had its being? Going out into

the spirit-world unclothed is truly very grand, but it is truly very awful and startling. And then there must be the shutting up of the outer man in the grave prison—with which said outer man it is extremely difficult, with all our philosophy and religion, not thoroughly to identify ourselves, ay, our whole selves. There must be a separation from friends—father, mother, husband, wife, sons, daughters, neighbours, companions, acquaintances. They may go with us to the entrance of the great dark pass, but there we must take leave of them, and walk along the narrow, very narrow foot-ledge all alone.

Valleys are the result of *disturbing forces*. You see the strata on the one side corresponding with the strata on the other—clay, sandstone, slate. Plainly there has been the tearing open of a passage through. The walls were not built up so at first. The solid substance has been rent in twain—rent by the bursting out of the caldron fires below, or by the intruding of mountain torrents from above. Volcanoes or deluges were at work there once, making mysterious havoc. And this Valley of the Shadow of Death is the result of a disturbing force.

The human world was not made originally in this way. What would have been the paradisaical plan of dealing with mankind had it lasted—whether there would have been an immortality on earth, or some way of getting *over the hills* into the other land, who shall say? But it is plain enough now, that sin has torn the hills asunder, and made the dark passage into the infinite regions. “Sin entered into the world, and death by sin.” That convulsion, more terrible than any of which geologists can find traces in upheaved and dislocated and tortured rocks, also exceeds them in this respect, that whereas they proceeded from the working of laws to which God himself gave form and impulse, this has happened in violation of law, has really dashed across it, and made a ruin and a chaos unparalleled.

Valleys in mountain lands are often like *haunted* houses, full of mysterious noises and strange sights, and stranger shadows. There come creeping over the soul unutterable sensations and thoughts as the pilgrim at nightfall listens to the echo, catches the last sun-ray shot aslant the rocks and glaciers, or feels the mists flung round him like a mantle. And the valleys in many a foreign land are infested with

what coarser minds will count more real. Had not David seen the glaring eyes of the wolf in the thicket, or heard his bark on the hills? Had he not had his path crossed by the bear, and beheld the lion coming up from the swellings of Jordan? The Valley of the Shadow of Death is really a *haunted* one. No region is so full of mystery. What forms do dying people sometimes see! What voices do they hear! What insight into the spiritual world do they experience! Glorious lights come there, not from a setting sun, but from a rising one. Yet the opposite of light, dense darkness, is also felt. What temptations and conflicts some Christians have in their dying hours! Satan knows that his time is short, and how fiercely he growls.

Let us leave the allegory for a moment. There lies in yonder room an old, gray-headed saint. His soul is departing. As we put aside the curtains, and take the withered hand in ours, and ask, "In the prospect of eternity, my friend, how is it with you?" he replies, "Dark—*very dark*." He lacks consolation. He is full of doubt. His mind wanders. He cannot recollect sweet refreshments he has met with in the way of his pilgrimage. He

part-fears that he will never get in at the gate  
 even. His sins haunt him ; and the devil is  
 on frightening him into despair. He cannot  
 see the Divine Shepherd. "Surely," he exclaims,  
 were right, He would now arise to help me ;  
 for my sins He hath brought me into this snare,  
 and left me." He forgets who has said, "There are  
 no deaths in their death ; but their strength is firm.  
 They are not troubled like other men ; neither are  
 they plagued like other men." But now comes a

The Christian lies in silence, and muses.  
 Thoughts and prays, and hopeful words are borne  
 on his mind. "Be of good cheer, Jesus Christ  
 with thee whole." Now the old faith springs up.  
 I see Him again !—(*Him* !)—and He tells me,  
 "When thou passest through the waters, I will be  
 with thee ; and through the rivers, they shall not  
 overthrow thee." Now comes assurance, and the  
 river is as still as a stone till the Christian is passed  
 by.

Let me here remark, that the passage through  
 the river is to be judged of by the former pilgrimage,  
 and need hardly say from whom I have borrowed these expres-

not that pilgrimage by this passage. We naturally wish that the last words of Christian friends should be hopeful, beautiful words. But too much may be made of them. A man's death is no key to the mystery of his life. His life is a key to whatever of mystery there may be in his death. My own father was a good man, if ever there was one, but the valley was haunted as he went through it. "Tell me not," said a friend to my poor, weeping mother, "how he died, but how he lived." I am greatly more puzzled with the serene deaths of some very inconsistent professors than with the conflict of holy souls in the last hour. How can we wonder at darkness when we think of *One* who said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken *me*?"

This valley is never without a traveller in it. Some spirit is at this moment passing through. Amidst this world of noise, bustle, fury, there is always a silent spot *there*. How pensive the reflection, as we turn over the volumes of history, "All these pages relate to the dead. They have all gone through the valley!" Amidst all your schemes of business, brother, and all your dreams of pleasure, you are walking thitherward. You and I have an *appointment* which we must keep in "that silent

waiting-hall where Adam meeteth with his children."

The valley cannot be very far off. We do not know where we are on our life-journey. The approaches to the spot we are speaking of are manifold, unexpected, sudden. Nowhere as here can wanderings amidst mountains lead to such disclosures of the regions yonder at unlooked-for moments. We may have to travel on for miles and miles before we reach the frontier, or it may be distant only a few furlongs. Our Guide alone knows, and He will not tell.

Now, the Christian can say with David, in the prospect of death, "I will fear *no* evil." Here we must distinguish between the *physical* and *moral* fear of death.

Some men have instinctively an intense fear of death. It is proportioned to their love of life, and that love is their strongest passion. They cling with the closest tenacity to the forms of their present existence—breathing the air, seeing the sun, using their limbs, talking to friends, hearing their voices—it is the familiar condition of consciousness, with pleasant memories gathered round it, and eager hopes too. Who can rationally wish to throw



all that away? Who can contentedly part with it without the expectation of some higher good instead? The attachment to life is inwrought by our heavenly Father, and is meant to be a cover and a shield for a treasure as delicate as it is precious, and not to be preserved without some such provision. This instinct is to life what the sheath is to the flower, what the husk is to the grain, what the shell is to the kernel, what the lashes are to the eye. But the love of life may reach an immense excess. It may amount to a moral disease. It may prove a fatal snare. To escape death some men have made sacrifices of what ought to be to all dearer than life. Not only skin upon skin, all that a man *hath*, have some given for life; but all that a man *is*—truth, faith, love, constancy. They have made a holocaust of the soul, and thrown it on the altar to be burnt, rather than walk down into the valley. Cranmer was strongly tempted to do that; poor fellow! he *half* did it; but, thank God, drew back before the sacrifice was finished. And to testify that, after all, he would not sell his soul for life, did penance by thrusting the fingers that held the recanting pen into the flames, saying, with tears,

that unworthy hand—that unworthy hand!” To shew the base animal fear by the inspiration of valor, is the design of our Lord’s courage-breath-words, “Fear not them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul : but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

On the other hand, there are some men in whom the instinctive love of life, and consequently the fear of death, is low and feeble. To them there is nothing terrible in dying. So small is the space which the present to their present existence holds in their thoughts, that there is left in it ample verge and room for the play of all the great personal and social passions.

They no more fear death than the eagle does the storm, or the horse the battle. Death is nothing to their patriotism—nothing to their ambition—nothing to their honour—nothing to their love. When Hofer was led out of his prison at Mantua, to fight for his country’s battles, and he was not to kneel down, while a white handkerchief was put round him wherewith to bind his eyes—“I have been accustomed to look into the mouths of cannon,” he said; adding, “I am accustomed to *stand* in the presence of my Creator, and in that position will I

deliver up my soul to Him." Then, throwing a piece of money to the corporal, he cried, with a firm voice, "Fire!" Many a youth, with a bright life before him at home, went off to the Crimean war to fight the Russians, and fell, without a murmur, in the trenches of Sebastopol. You may count by thousands men who would rather die than bear the accusation of cowardice. And not seldom will people lay violent hands on themselves before they will survive the shipwreck of their affections. All this is to be considered in dealing with death as a subject of religious reflection and appeal.

There are those, then, who have no fear of dying, and consequently do not feel the need of religious consolations to prepare them for the event. But it is far different with others. Those who through fear of death have all their lifetime been subject to bondage, do need greatly the comforts which the gospel brings. And of that fear there is no form that so much requires the blessed remedy afforded in the gospel, as that which consists in apprehension and alarm respecting the spiritual aspects of our mortal change. The moral fear of death may blend with the physical. The former

may exist where the latter is unknown. Death, as the dissolution of nature, may seem a trifle—no more than darting into the air is to the dragon-fly. Yet, morally considered, it may assume a character of indescribable awfulness. To die, and enter the spirit-world—to die, and become conscious of an incorporeal existence which shall give power to thought and feeling unknown before—to die, and leave the world of probation and discipline in which, as long as it lasts, a saving change is possible, for one of immutable fixity and everlasting development, without the possibility of any saving change—that is a view of death which, to every sane man, may well appear most awful, and really comes to many at times with an overwhelming solemnity. To die, that we may give an account of life—to die, that we may feel the responsibilities of life—to die, that we may realise the issues of life—to die, that we may stand before the Lord of life—to die, that we may enter upon strange, unknown conditions of life—here are elements in death which I am astonished do not oftener lay hold upon human minds with a convulsive force, arresting their whole attention, and absorbing their entire sensibilities. It is equally to

be deplored and to be wondered at, that so many, so very many, should walk through life utterly heedless of those infinite realms that *will* open on the traveller when the death-valley is passed. Nothing astonishes me more than the apathy which people manifest in the prospect of the future, save the wretched ease with which they delude themselves into the idea that all will be right when death is over. We have all heard the story of the Strid in the Vale of Wharf, and the fatal leap of the boy who thought he should clear the gulf from rock to rock, but, in the very act of springing, was dragged down into the foaming torrent by the leash he grasped. And so, alas, alas ! many a one who thinks that he shall make the passage of the *death Strid* safe enough, will find, when the leap is taken, that, instead of being on the everlasting hills, he is down at the bottom of the eternal depths, dragged there by the chain that bound to him for ever his worldliness and sin.

We proceed to explain the nature of *the Christian antidote* to the fear of death.

The fearless tone which the psalm expresses betrays not the bull-dog sort of courage which belongs

the soldier and the sailor. The Christian man recognises just grounds of apprehension, but counter-  
reasons are perceived and accepted enough to overcome the antagonistic terrors.

What is that which reasonably saves a thoughtful man from fear, as he looks at the entrance of the death-pass? It is the conviction, "*Thou art with me*," springing from faith in the New Testament and news.

Put the words into the lips of a *sentimentalist*. Here he lies, enfeebled by disease, but with a mind still active, with a fancy pensively employed with images of beauty which are felt to be on the point of fading. He asks you, as he lies helpless on the sofa, to wheel him to the window, where he may see and smell the flowers, and catch a view of the distant hills, and the woods and waters lying yonder, flooded with the golden, hazy light of the setting sun. And then he whispers, "How calmly glorious all nature—the home of the Eternal! I am His child. All nature is my home. I surrender my spirit into the hands of the Great Spirit. As He gave it, so I return it." Such poetry would be true fact, if not very strong in thought, or consistently

devout in sentiment, were we to imagine that an angel could die, and that he would employ his last moments in sentimental reveries. But in the case of man as he is, as every man has been since Adam until now, it is neither more nor less than a *poetry of lies*. For a sinner so to die is to die in a pleasant dream, from which a terrible awakening must follow, amidst the eternal realities. The Bible-teaching of man's lost condition, even the testimony of conscience to the need of a Saviour, dispels that sort of enchantment, "sicklied o'er," as it is, "with a pale cast of thought."

Then put the words, "Thou art with me," into the lips of an *awakened sinner*, and you have a repetition of the scene in Eden :—" And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day : and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden." The most fearful of all fearful sights to a man convinced of sin, as he looks into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, is just this, that God is there. Life has been to him, perhaps, anything but a pleasant land—indeed a sandy desert, not a place of green pastures. He has been fighting

for years with all sorts of difficulties, and has borne all sorts of burdens, but he would willingly enough go back and face them all again, rather than advance to meet his God. To him "the day of the Lord is darkness, and not light: as if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him."

The words of the psalm, as expressive of comfort, must come from the lips of a *pardoned* man, a *renewed* man—a man who looks at God in Christ, who sees Him in the child Jesus, as He lies in His mother's arms in Bethlehem—and in the man Jesus, with the wild beasts in the wilderness, and with the worse Spirit of Evil that haunted its wastes—and in the sympathising Friend who shewed that He thought it better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting—and in the Divine Prophet who said, "I am the resurrection and the life"—and in Him who drank of the cup in the garden, and bowed His head upon the cross. No sinner can be reasonably saved from fear as he looks on death, but one who by faith apprehends the presence of God in Christ. No creature can be safe and happy without God. No *sinning* creature can enjoy a God-given safety



and happiness till he be pardoned and brought home to God. And the pardoning and the bringing home, according to the New Testament, is through one medium—only one.

So pardoned, so brought home to God through Christ, so renewed in the image of Him who created him, the believer, in his dying hour, as he says, "Thou art with me," says also in effect, "Thou wilt shew me the path of life;" and the prospect of that path of life may well subdue all fear, and fill the soul with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Here let us pause, and examine the ground, and measure the breadth of the blessed hope through which the Christian overcomes the fear of death.

How does the hope shape itself? With this Book in our hands, our only light upon the matter, what view do we get of the great mystery of a future life? Into what form does it resolve itself in our conceptions?

Doubtless, in the first place, it comes before us as a fact—a certainty that there is a path through the valley—that a broad, bright roadway does really run from it up to heaven's gates—that the Divine Precursor leads the way—that, by His infallible wisdom

and irresistible power, He will bring the whole crowd of pilgrims safely home.

But more than this, in the second place, the one grand comprehensive fact resolves itself into two distinct facts. Two forms of being are seen to await the Christian—the one coming before the other; the one very near, the other how remote we cannot tell; the one every now and then almost touching us, then running onwards till it falls into the other, when the whole is seen swelling out and spreading over an infinite space, where our thoughts are lost in an ocean of glory. We see that the first pathway, through which God will hereafter lead the faithful, conducts to a separate state, which the New Testament calls “Abraham’s bosom,” “paradise,” “an absence from the body—a being with the Lord.” All this the Apostle Paul conveys to our minds when he expresses “a desire to depart and to be with Christ;” for surely he could not have said this if life be succeeded by a long, unconscious, dreamless sleep, pervading the soul as well as the body. Did no awakening follow, how could a vigorous, active mind like his, burning with love and zeal in his Maker’s cause, anxious to serve Him incessantly,

wish to fall into a protracted, ignoble, and visionless slumber? And how could such a state of blank oblivion warrant his calling it "a being with Christ?" Impossible! The fact of a separate existence of the soul after death, a better and more glorious life than the present one, is revealed in the Bible beyond all question. And after the first of these life-paths no Christian can entertain a doubt of the second: that there is a pathway out of the grave up to heaven—that the door of the prison-house of the body will be opened on the great resurrection day—the day of days, the last day—that what is "sown in corruption will be raised in incorruption," to reveal its unfading beauty for ever in the new heaven and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

But, in the third place, beyond the simple fact that there are two such habitations and paths, beyond the fact that the habitations are glorious and the paths safe, what do we know? A vast deal may be conjectured, much inferred (perhaps with great probability, from Scripture records); but very little do we positively know, because very little is *plainly* revealed. All our ideas of the future state

fall under three classes—first, speculations ; secondly, inferences ; thirdly, distinct, authorised beliefs. The last only can be said to be certain. Of these alone are we sure, positively sure. The main scriptural idea of the separate state is simply being “with Christ.” The main scriptural ideas of the state after the resurrection are those of an abode in a very magnificent world, full of light, glory, and righteousness—of an existence there to be spent without end, in friendship with all the holy who have ever lived, and in the love, service, and enjoyment of God.

It is plain, then, in the fourth place, that, beyond the fact of a future life, which is clear as noon-day—beyond the gleams of glory that fall upon the prospect, rendering it so ineffably inviting to the eye of faith—there rests on the object of the Christian’s hope a cloud of mystery. Why ? I apprehend there are infinitely just, wise, and holy reasons for the arrangement. We may be sure that He who has revealed the hope of immortal blessedness, is, in the *measure* of this revelation, as in every other proceeding of His, perfect in wisdom. Reasons are not wanting, even in our feeble conceptions, for the limited amount of Divine instruction supplied on this

subject. They are of the following description :— There is an utter impossibility of a *full* revelation of the other world being made to us. If the glorious life of heaven cannot be fully revealed, that, of course, is a sufficient reason why it is not. But undoubtedly we can conceive of more being revealed. In relation to the wish that we did know more—a wish very common with imaginative and speculating minds—it may be remarked, in John Foster's words,—“ A far stronger impression is made on thinking spirits (and on others nothing makes an impression) by an undefined magnificence, by a grand and awful mystery, when we are absolutely certain that there is a stupendous reality veiled in that mystery, when quite certain, too, that it relates to ourselves, and that it will at length be disclosed. Such a grand reality, thus mysteriously veiled, attracts thinking spirits most mightily, like the mystic and awful recess in the inmost part of the temple. It keeps in action inquisitiveness, conjectures, and expectation. It sets the mind on imagining the utmost that it can of grandeur and importance, and the idea still is, after the utmost efforts, ‘ It is far greater than all that.’ And thus, if we will think, this grandeur veiled in

ness has a more powerful effect on the mind than any distinct particulars made palpable to the apprehension, and brought down to our level in order to be made so. So far, then, it is better that it should not yet appear what we shall be."

That there is a path of glorious life we know, but not exactly what it is. Through what scenes it winds, to what realms it penetrates, what prospects it will unfold, to what sublime elevation it leads, to what end it of glorious creatureship and union with Deity will bring the pilgrim, how he will walk along it, how God will lead him, speak to him, felicitate him, all this remains to be known. But the revelation of all will come. Sure as that word which faileth not, it will come. Yes; the Lord will shew the path of life. The first pathway, the way into the invisible and separate state, He will soon shew at once. He will open the gate of this wall-girt region of existence, walled up on every side with mystery, and, through death's deep valley, a hand, brighter than the sun, shall lead the traveller, and he shall behold the city that hath foundations, the rock-built citadel of redeemed souls, and up its cliffs, along steps cut out by the Lord of pilgrims, shall he arise, and

then reach the portals and enter in, and, as he does so, say to pain, and sin, and fear, and death, "Farewell!" The second pathway, too, that of the resurrection, God will shew us in His own good time. "The Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and the trump of God;" and then, quitting the sepulchre, the holy shall ascend to regions which eye hath not seen, and shall travel on beyond the dwelling-place of separate souls, which forms but the outpost of the celestial world. They shall reach the very interior of the promised land, the central city of God, the metropolis of heaven.

How can a man who believes in such a presence, and in such a path, fear any evil?

Finally, let us point out the connexion between spiritual courage in facing death and all other courage amidst life's troubles and sorrows.

When the moral fear of death is overcome, what is there which consistently can make us afraid?

"My good man," said Henry IV. of France to the potter Palissy, when in prison—who was at once a martyr to the love of art and a confessor of the Protestant faith—"My good man, for many years

On have been in the service of our family, and we have offered you to retain your religion amidst fires and massacres, but at present I find myself so pressed by the Guises and my own people, that I am compelled to give you into the hands of my enemies. These two poor women, whom I see with you, are to be burned to-morrow ; and so will you, unless you be converted." "Sire," replied Bernard, "I am ready to yield up my life for the glory of God. You say you feel pity for me. It is rather I that should pity you, who utter such words as these, 'I am compelled.' This is not the language of a king ; and neither yourself nor the Guises, with all your people, shall *compel* me ; for *I know how to die*."

A fearless man can be *compelled* to do nothing. You see that oak. The fierce October winds, rushing down the gullies of the hills with the violence of the Maelström, fail to shake it, though they do riot savagely amidst those tougher than iron boughs, which stand out in such decided outline against the angry sky. The brave soul, strong in the faith of God, is like that.

You see that rock. The mountain torrent has been beating against it for ages past, only to



polish and brighten its ever-dripping sides. The man borne up by the conviction that God is *with* him, and that he *dares* fear no evil, is like *that*. There is no compelling such a man to yield, for he is afraid of neither earth nor hell—of neither *life* nor death—of neither anything he knows on *this* side the grave, nor of anything he does not know on the other. The noble filial fear of God frees *him* from the despotism of all other fear. Hence *Luther's* bravery: "I will go to Worms, though *there* were as many devils there as tiles on the house-top *s*." Hence Zwingli's song :

"Heaven's height my purpose can't make fail,  
Nor all the mighty powers of hell,  
For, lo ! its keys my Saviour keeps."

And from the same cause sprung the boldness of Peter and John, and the rest of the apostles, and the martyrs and confessors of our earlier and later Christendom. "Obstinate men !" exclaimed the Roman magistrates and people, when they could not bend the Christians of the first three centuries to the yoke. "Conceited, contentious men !" said the hierarchs and justices of Elizabeth and James, when they could not make Puritans bow down their con-

ances to human authority. Yet all the while were  
se men moved by that reliant courage which,  
recoming the moral fear of death, is but the reflec-  
t of childlike Christian faith. "Obedient, loyal,  
able men," will all right-judging readers of the  
t pronounce those spiritual heroes of the first and  
enteenth centuries to be. May God inspire us  
h that holy fear of Himself which extinguishes  
fear of aught beside!



## IX

### The Divinely-Spread Table.

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Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine  
enemies."—PSALM xxiii. 5.

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**THE** Bible is as wonderful for the human sympathies which it expresses as for the Divine authority with which it comes. The Book from God is just the Book for man. It touches all circumstances of our present condition no less carefully than the interests of our spiritual nature, and the awful prospects of our future eternity. It is like Jacob's ladder—the top touches heaven, but the foot is on earth. In its grand thoughts of the Divine, the Infinite, and the Eternal, it is an image of that glorious One who piles together the clouds, and makes the firmament like a landscape, and draws upwards the eyes and thoughts of men—giving glimpses and types of the spiritual world in the unfathomed azure sky, and in the stars which silently walk out every night amidst the darkness in choirs and companies. And in the application of itself to little things, the Bible is an image of that glorious and condescending One who makes tiny birds, and tinier flowers, and cares for them

all with a gentler and more considerate care than the mother for her first-born.

The Bible is an image also of the divine Christ, and the human Jesus. It is just like Him who was transfigured on the mount, who shone in awful majesty on the apostles, so that they shrank from the vision with holy fear ; and like Him, too, when He saw the people in the wilderness, tired and hungry, and said, " I have compassion on the multitude, because they have nothing to eat."

The Bible is meant to lift up our souls to heaven, to fill us with noble thoughts ; but that it may make us ascend, it descends itself, and gives us hints of counsel and encouragement for daily life in humble forms and minor ways. I like to compare it to the angels of whom it tells us so many beautiful things. As I dwell on its celestial origin, it reminds me of the angel standing in the sun. Looking at it as a book for the million, it puts forth wings, like the angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to all the nations. The enshrinement of deep mysteries recalls to one's memory the angels looking into the closed ark. When enjoining and guiding spiritual worship, it seems

the angel beside the golden altar. Inspiring believer with a hope which maketh not ashamed, appears as the angel on the celestial threshold, when we hear saying, "Come up hither." But rising from the sublimity to the condescension of the Bible, then it comes before us cheering the social life, like the angels who visited Abraham's tent—pointing us in hours of need to the table that providence spreads for us in the wilderness, as the angel shewed Elijah the cake baken on the coals, and the use of water at his head. And when hallowing all daily toils, is it not even as the angel who appeared to Zechariah in the shop of the four carpenters?

The Scripture just read illustrates the character of the Bible in the latter point of view. It is a text for week-days, and for working people, and for men and women in poverty. Yes, and for those in plenty,

"Thou spreadest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." David changes the image of himself as a sheep into that of a guest. The man rises in thought and feeling from preservation in the midst of trouble to the possession of enduring joy. The idea of the Valley of the Shadow of Death melts into a picture of Oriental plenty.



When reading of the *table spread*, we see how it ought to afford encouragement to the perplexed. Where is there a congregation on Sunday, large or small, promiscuous or select, in which some may not be found so hardly pressed that they know not where to look for the supply of temporal necessities? Under many a smart-looking bonnet there is a head full of throbbing care, and beneath many a coat of good broad-cloth a heart beating with throes of agony. And it may be that this book is now in the hands of one who, if not agitated by the question of to-day, "What shall I eat, and what shall I drink, and wherewithal shall I be clothed?" feels the pressure of the inquiry touching to-morrow, "How shall I go on providing for my family, where find employment, in what way get out of that debt, and pay that bill?" It is the old story of poverty and trouble. For such people the psalm has a word of comfort. It tells of Him who prepares a table for His creatures. A plant grows in eastern jungles which sheds a clear light when all beside is dark. To midnight travellers amidst Himalayan hills it seems as if it were a lamp to guide them on their wanderings. And are not these words just such a

lamp, such a flame-tipped index, pointing to gracious, all-comprehensive Providence whence men are delivered from David's day, and long before, received daily bread ?

"Thou spreadest a table before me," is the utterance of the poor man's *faith*.

At 180 Park, the African traveller, was plundered of his clothes by savages. He was five hundred miles from any European settlement. In an agony of distress he happened to look on a small moss in

It was not larger than the top of one of his fingers. "Can that Being," he thought, "who planted, created, and brought to perfection in this obscure corner of the world a thing which appears of so small account, look with unconcern upon the situation of the offerings of creatures formed after His own image ?" This sermon on Providence, preached by the meek sprig, restored the faith and courage of the wandering adventurer.

After her, returning home from Leipsic, was struck by the beauty of the harvest fields. "How it stands, the yellow corn, on its fair taper stems ; its golden ears bent, all rich and waving there ! The meek and patient at God's kind bidding, has produced it once

again—the bread of man.” He sat in his garden ~~in a~~ Wittenberg one evening at sunset, and saw a ~~bird~~ perch on a tree for the night. “That little bird ~~above~~ above it are the stars and deep heaven of world ~~ids~~ yet it has folded its little wings, gone trustfully ~~to~~ rest there in its home. The Maker of it has gi ~~ver~~ it, too, a home.” The great Luther was poor ~~he~~ had little of this world’s goods, but his faith in ~~Pro~~vidence, in the God of the golden corn, in the Go ~~nd~~ of the beautiful bird, gave his mind ease, his spirit ~~rest~~.

“Thou spreadest a table before me.” This is ~~also~~ the expression of the poor man’s *experience*. At the time of the ejectment of the two thousand ministers from the Church of England, a gentleman reckoned up as many as one hundred persons in his own neighbourhood who suffered from that unrighteous measure. They were turned on Providence; and he adds, that though oft in straits, they were not forsaken. Though the ministers, he says, were brought low, had many children, were greatly harassed by persecution, and their friends generally poor and unable to support them, he never knew or heard of a Nonconformist minister in prison for debt. Providence was to them instead of livings.

They maintained their families with credit, died in peace, and were laid in their graves with honour. As an example of unexpected supply from the God of providence, we are told that one who was very poor, and in much perplexity, was engaged in prayer with his family, adapting his petitions to their necessities, when a carrier knocked at the door, and delivered some money as a present from friends, but would not disclose their name.

The Pilgrim Fathers, on their arrival in America, were some of them reduced to great straits. Among other hardships, they were at times in want of bread, and would have been glad of the crusts which fell from their tables before persecution drove them out of their fatherland. On one occasion, some poor men went down to the sea-side, to look out for a ship which was bringing them provision; but they looked in vain. However, the doctrine which had been taught them by the wild flowers which grew in the hedgerows of old England, and which they had often gathered when boys and girls, was now made good. For, impelled by hunger, they picked up the shell-fish, and found them so wholesome that they lived upon them for a good while, find-

ing that God made that humble fare as nourishing to them as He did the pulse to Daniel and the rest. And how was their faith in Providence confirmed by this seasonable supply, and how humbly they joined in the words of a good man among them, who, standing up by the ocean side, returned thanks to God for causing "them to seek of the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hid in the sand!"—a passage in Deuteronomy, a part of the blessing which Moses pronounced on the tribe of Zebulun—a passage till then unobserved by the company, but which afterwards endeared to them the writings of Moses more than ever.

In a later time of persecution, a poor woman was taken before a magistrate for attending a conventicle, and was told by him, "I have often wished to have you in my power, and now I shall send you to prison, and then how will you be *fed*?" She replied, "If it be my heavenly Father's pleasure, I shall be fed from your table." And so she was, for the judge's wife being present at the examination, and struck with the woman's firmness and modesty, took care to supply her with food during her imprisonment. Nor did she fail of a reward, in thus

feeding one of God's children ; for God was pleased to give her the true bread that came down from heaven for the life of the world.

Professor Franke was the founder of an hospital near Halle, in Saxony. He felt that he had a special mission so to do, and trusted in the God who fed the ravens to send him and the objects of his benevolence the needful supplies. "About February in the year 1699," he observes, "I found myself in great difficulties. All our provisions were spent, and the daily necessities of the poor called for large supplies. I closely adhered in my mind to these words, 'Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you,' and I turned the whole bent of my soul upon a close union with God. When I was paying out the last of the money, I said in myself, 'Lord, look upon my poverty.' On leaving the chamber, I found a student who waited for my coming, and presented me with seventy crowns, just sent from some friends at a distance of two hundred miles."

Another time, he relates that he was reduced to extremities, but in prayer he found himself deeply

affected with the fourth petition in the Lord's prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," and his thoughts were fixed in a more especial manner upon the words "this day," because that day was one of great trial. And before he had finished praying there came a supply of four hundred crowns.

Beautiful facts are these, leading us to say in the simple words of a German hymn—

"Ye who the name of Jesus bear,  
Yield not yourselves to earthly care,  
God is your great Creator.  
In time of ill make Him your stay;  
He'll aid your feeble nature.

"The birds that lodge in field or wood,  
All made for your delight and good,  
These doth our Father cherish.  
And will He e'er His own forget?  
He'll leave you not to perish.

"Look on the flowers that deck the field,  
Whose beauty every place doth yield,  
From earth behold them springing;  
And yet each moment, hastening by,  
Them to their end is bringing.

"If God so clothe the verdant grass,  
That in its beauty doth surpass,  
And yet so soon decayeth;  
Far greater things for us He doth,  
Far greater care displayeth.

"Thy flock, Lord Jesu, ne'er forsake,  
Who didst of all our woes partake,  
On earth so deeply grieving.  
Now send us aid, O Lord, we pray,  
Our every need relieving."

But this picture of the table spread has an interest and a lesson for *the children of plenty*. If you were born in wealth, or if, in the revolution of what you call fortune's wheel, you have been lifted up from want to affluence, then forget not Him who has spread your table. An unseen hand has been over you. The skill, tact, and business power which have made you what you are, came originally as a gift from Him who is "wise in counsel and excellent in working." The occurrence, too, of that singular juncture, the grouping of events so favourable to your success, the meeting of the friend who helped you out of your difficulties, and set your feet on a rock, were all appointments on the part of Providence, for "the way of man is not in himself, and it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."

Your duty, therefore, is to offer grateful acknowledgment to your heavenly Father on your bended knees—to realise your responsibilities, according to the measure of your possessions—and to remember



that in ceasing to be a servant, as once you were, you did not become your own master in the highest sense, but are still one of the household of the Universal Lord. Your duty is to "use this world as not abusing it, for the fashion of this world passeth away," and "to do good unto all men, especially to them that are of the household of faith;" thus "laying up for yourselves in store a good foundation against the time to come, that you may lay hold on eternal life."

This picture of a table spread is suggestive of other wants.

The glutton gorged to the full, or the epicure feasted on dainty meat, leaves the best portion of his nature to starvation. And a man whose life has been like translating into true history the fable of Midas—who has been so successful in his speculation, that all he touches turns to gold—may be much poorer than Lazarus, who lay at Dives' gates, waiting for the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. The mind must be fed. When it is stored with knowledge, and affluent in thought, but is bound to a body hunger-stricken and care-worn—the gaunt frame, the fleshless cheek-bone, and the eye full of wild fire and deep woe, tell a tale too easily



comprehended, and awaken our pity for the sufferer, while it inspires admiration for the child of genius and culture. But, on the other hand, a famished mind in a pampered body makes one of the most wretched specimens of humanity we can ever meet with ; for while it kills all envy, it rouses up contempt. Utterly inexcusable are the mentally starved ; for what a table has God spread for the intellect, in outer nature, in the fruits of reason and fancy, in the books of the wise and good, in the ways of noble and heroic men, and above all, in the pages of His Holy Word ! Only idleness, the neglect to gather what He has strawed, to feed on what He has spread, can ever lead to this famine of the mind.

But the intellectual needs are not the deepest, nor the feast of reason and imagination, literature and art, science and song, the noblest and best. The wants of the soul surpass all. What a table has the Lord spread for them !

The prophet indicates the largeness of the provision, when he describes it as a mountain feast. The hill-top, lifted high in the sight of all the nations, is spread with "fat things," as if no regal palace,

no kingly board, would suffice to serve as an image of the vast, the inexhaustible supply of gospel grace.

And our blessed Saviour, in another way, conveys to us an idea of the munificent bountifulness of the provision, when He describes it as a marriage supper, not for a select few of God's nobles, but for the commonalty of His kingdom, even for the city outcast, and the country pauper. "Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready." Some refused. "Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." Beautiful parable! And how I like, too, that story in Eastern fiction, of the great feast in the king's house by the wide highway, to which all wayfarers were invited, and for years

the doors *were nailed back*, that all might enter. The door of God's banqueting-house of mercy might well have been nailed the other way. It *might* well have been with bands of iron so tightly closed, that no power of man could have opened the leaved gates, and make them roll asunder on their hinges. Your guilt had closed the door. Every sin had been a nail in the way of opening the door. But the Lord, in His infinite goodness, has thrown the portals wide asunder, and *nailed them back*, and the Divine voice from within addresses us as we pass by, saying, "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars; she hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled."

Now, as we speak of this table which the Lord hath spread for us, we feel we are touching one of the blessed commonplaces of the gospel. Not, indeed, common as to the degree of its importance,

and the measure of its beauty, but common, thank God, as to the frequency of its recurrence in gospel preaching and Christian literature. Through its commonness it may even become unimpressive, just as common garden flowers may lose their charm for eyes sated with conventional attractions, and the lilies may be crushed under foot by the gay reveller, or the busy man of trade speeding onwards to his work. How often is a grand prospect at a cottage door unseen by those who live there, and come hourly forth, absorbed in daily occupations! The brook, under those shady elms, that makes such music in the poet's ear, is not heard by the ploughman who passes it every night on his way home. But let any of these, so familiar with nature's loveliness, and so heedless of it, because so familiar, be removed to some far-off land, to scenes of colonial exile, the diggings or the bush—and at eventide, when recollections come gushing through the heart, will not the English garden flowers shine out like stars, and the lily look fair as the planet Venus, and the English hills and valleys, fields and hedges, photograph themselves in living pictures, and the brook be heard as a lovely song?


and, then, oh the sadness of the thought, "I shall never see them more!" But, when far removed from gospel privileges, gospel sermons, and gospel teachers—when removed further from them than you can be in this world—how intensely beautiful, and more, and unutterably more sad, will images of the mountain feast, and the marriage of the king's son, come over the awful solitude and silence of your soul—a spirit of the past, the ghost of blessedness, forever dead!

The spread table speaks to Christians in particu-

You do not altogether slight the mercy that furnished it. You have tasted something of joy and peace, comfort and hope, and only regret that through your unbelief you have not enjoyed vastly more. You have glad memories of your first sense of spiritual safety, of your first fully answered prayer, and of your first holy communion. And since then, after spiritual conflict, after warring with evil spirits, when you have come out of the Hell-haunted Valley, it has been like Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings; your Melchisedec, the priestly King of righteousness and peace, has come forth to meet you

with "the bread of God, sent down from heaven," and the "wine of the kingdom." And when you have made a solemn covenant with the Lord, declaring, "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient," there has perhaps come close afterwards a season of unusual spiritual elevation, rapture, and gladness, akin to that of Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: "And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire-stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink."

But the feasts of hope surpass the feasts of memory. As men, the older we grow the more we look back. As Christians, the ripper we grow the more we look forward. Deep and varied is the meaning folded up in the inspired words, "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those which are before, I press toward the mark." A banquet more royal awaits us when we get home than ever we can taste on our travels. Now, the Lord of the pilgrim's way comes and sups



with us whenever we open the door, and brings His own provisions. Then, He will right royally receive us to sup with Him. Now, in our own little tent, does He sit down with us. But then, in His Father's kingdom we shall sit down with Him. Grandest of all grand promises is this: "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them."

Once more. To eat with another is, in the East, a sign of friendship. He who comes famished into the tent of an Arab sheikh, and partakes of his bread and salt, is thenceforth bound to him by ties of special obligation. To turn upon his host afterwards would be to violate the laws of gratitude, and to commit the gravest offence. Hence, says the Psalmist, in the name of another, "He who did eat of my bread hath lifted up the heel against me." That sad lament was a revelation of aggravated treachery. It discloses the infernal sting in the serpent heart of Judas, that he betrayed his Lord, after dipping his hand with Him in the dish. "The hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table," were words



which, to an Eastern ear, would proclaim a heavier crime than they could convey to ours. They formed a prophecy of the murderous infidelity of a solemnly pledged friend. Eating of God's gifts, eating of gospel provisions, eating at the Lord's table, we come under peculiar obligations, shadowed forth by the old rules of Arab hospitality. Our professed acceptance of His mercy is a pledge of friendship. After that, is our *hand on His table* a hand that serves, or a hand that betrays?

The table is spread in the presence of enemies.

There is a tone of exultation, I think, here, such as we often catch in the Old Testament. The Hebrew saints were living in a world, if not fuller of mutual enmities than our modern one, yet more unscrupulous in the expression and avowal of them. We smother our enmities, though they often burn tremendously hot under the load of conventional politeness which we prudently heap over them; and our words, softer than butter, are often sheaths for sharp swords. But the enmities of the early Eastern world flashed up in an unchecked blaze, and the weapons of anger were brandished like naked steel. On the one hand, David's enemies fiercely assailed

him; and on the other hand, with an intense glow of resentment, David triumphed over them. If this psalm could be dated late enough, we might suppose that the note of joy in the words before us had been struck by the discomfiture of the ill-natured Nabal, after his discreet wife had brought the roving captain "two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs," saying, "The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God; and the souls of mine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling." But whatever might be the circumstances in particular referred to, there comes out the expression of hearty joy over the disappointment of his enemies. He sees them looking on enviously, grudgingly, maliciously; and he exults that the Lord has overthrown *them*, and helped *him*.


Christians should take care that their resentment does not become revenge, that their joy over the frustration of the malicious designs of others does not sink into a war of malice against malice.

"In the presence of mine enemies."

The words may remind some of what has actually happened to them in life. Good men often have enemies. Young men setting out in life, anxious to be diligent and successful, are exposed to the enmity of the idle, who pant to snatch at wealth by bold manœuvres, instead of attaining it by quiet industry; and think that by removing a virtuous rival out of the way, they may sooner get at what they wish for; and the time comes when, Ahithophel-like, and Haman-like, the plotter is ruined by his own plots, and the intended victim—and that without any assault on his part, but simply through the wonder-working providence of God—becomes conqueror. He sees his enemies fall around him, though not by his hand. But the Christian law is the law of forgiveness; and though anger and indignation be inspired by wrongs, yet withal compassion should be cherished for every wrong-doer.

“In the presence of mine enemies.”

It indicates good done to us in spite of opposition and obstacles. Divine purposes are ever swimming on the great tide of events against the stream—On and on they push their way, surmounting all antagonistic forces. God's dealings to some men



throughout are in a state of constant warfare against human enmity. Heroic souls breast the angry waves, the odds visibly against them. Everything seems unfavourable, yet God's providence is on their side, and at last their enemies become ashamed, the hinderers are changed to helpers, every one submitting himself "with pieces of silver," and the foes sit down at the table as friends.

"In the presence of mine enemies."

We have spoken of spiritual blessings, and we cannot but connect the enjoyment of them with these words. Salvation was provided for us in spite of the malice of Satan. Indeed, it is nothing less than a festal joy, the consequence and the celebration of the victory won by the Incarnate Word. Never let us think that spreading the banquet of redeeming love is just as simple a thing as laying out the resources of nature, or as the husbanding and bestowment of the stores of Providence. To feed you and me from day to day is as easy for God to do as to feed the sparrows. But to feed our souls with the bread of life—that necessitated the incarnation and crucifixion of the Son of man—that brought on Him the persecution of more enemies

than Pilate, Caiaphas, and the rabble. "It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make ~~the~~ Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Through storm and battle the Redeemer had to force His way; and when you eat and drink of pardon and peace, holiness and hope, remember there was paid for them the price of blood, and that the story of David's valiant men at Bethlehem's well has been infinitely more than equalled by Him who not only imperilled, but actually laid down, His life for the "sheep." And now there is no getting to Mercy's feast, no sitting at it, no participation in its bounties, without spiritual opposition and conflict. "Principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places," will, if they can, keep us away, or drive us away, and every measure of spiritual enjoyment we realise is the fruit of a victory over those worst of enemies, our easily besetting sins. England's sovereigns in the old time publicly feasted in their palaces, and as they sat at table, were exposed to gazing crowds; and we, while participants of the gospel supper, have observers of our conduct, inimical as well as friendly; for "we are a spectacle

unto the world, to angels, and to men." Watched by foes visible and invisible we shall be to the end—a fact which should awaken our vigilance, and promote our consistency of Christian behaviour; but at last there shall come a translation, and from the tent in the desert compassed by foes, we shall be raised to our home in the Holy City, where there shall be only friends; and the last sentence of the life-story of Christians might run in the words of the Apocalypse respecting the two witnesses: "And they heard a voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them."



X

The Anointing.

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“Thou anointest my head with oil.”—PSALM **xxiii** 5.





“FILL thine horn with oil,” said the Lord to His faithful servant, the prophet Samuel, who had returned to Ramah to mourn over the sad disappointment of his expectations about Saul, whom the good old man, by Divine direction, had anointed king over Israel : “Fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite.” The sins of the reigning sovereign had incurred a forfeiture of the crown. He had disobeyed the Lord, by whose favour alone he held the royalties of his realm ; and now those royalties were to be transferred to one who would prove more faithful to his Divine Suzerain. “I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite ; for I have provided me a king among his sons.” The venerable prophet at first shrunk from the commission given him, lest he should arouse the rage of the wayward prince ; but, assured by further directions to go to Jesse as one who had to perform the offering of sacrifice, Samuel took heart,

and went his way to the city. As he approached the gates—associated with the beautiful story of the Moabitess and her marriage with Boaz—the elders, agitated, perhaps not so much by fear as affection, at the appearance of so dignified and influential a personage—their hearts fluttering, their hands outstretched, their heads bowed down—went forth with all the carefulness of Oriental hospitality to welcome the visitor, saying, “Comest thou peaceably?” “Peaceably,” he replied: “I am come to sacrifice unto the Lord: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice.” He entered the fields and homestead of Jesse, who “went among men for an old man in the days of Saul.” How far at first he explained the main purpose of his visit we are not told; but when seven of the sons of Jesse had come into the house from their pastoral and agricultural occupations, and one named Eliab was seen to be the tallest and most handsome of the brothers—soldier, too, as well as farmer—Samuel judged that he was the man to lead the hosts of Israel. So he exclaimed, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is before him.” “No,” said the Lord to Samuel; “Look not on his countenance, or on the height

of his stature ; because I have refused him : for the Lord seeth not as man seeth ; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." Jesse called Abinadab to pass before Samuel ; and he said, "Neither hath the Lord chosen this." With Shammah it was the same. The first three were accustomed to the use of arms, for "they followed Saul to the battle ;" but not to any one of the warriors did the finger of the Almighty point. Four more came ; in all, seven. It was the same. "Are here all thy children ?" asked the prophet, prompted by a Divine impulse. No, not all : "There remaineth yet the youngest ; and he keepeth the sheep." Perhaps he had not sent for him, as he was too juvenile to be present on such an occasion of solemnity. Samuel, acting through-out under Divine orders, said, "Send and fetch him : for we will not sit down till he come hither." The lad was speedily brought—no doubt in his shepherd dress ; and his ruddy face reddened into deeper ruddiness by the blushes of modesty, and his countenance shaded with surprise at the sudden and mysterious summons. It was revealed at once that here was the king amongst Jesse's sons, whom the

Lord had sent his minister to seek. And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him: for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him."

We have related the history at length, because we mean to use it as suggestive of illustrations respecting a main point in our present thoughts. We are of opinion that this remarkable incident must have been in David's mind when he wrote the words, "Thou anointest my head with oil," for three reasons:—*First*, The original admits of being rendered, "Thou hast anointed," or "Thou didst anoint" — in reference to a particular instance of anointing. *Secondly*, The psalm seems to have been written while David remained a shepherd, yet *after* he had begun to have enemies—a circumstance—belonging to the period of his life between his unction and his accession. *Thirdly*, The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from the day of his anointing. Does that not mean that then commenced his special inspiration? and does not *this* appear to be his earliest song?


The ceremony over, Samuel returned to Ramah; and what more natural than that David should go back to the sheepfold? When the sheep looked on

him again, they were all insensible to the change which had passed on their young master; but not more unaware were those dumb animals than the greatest lords in Israel of the Divine transference of the crown. The memory of that anointing would be a fixed idea in David's mind. As he lay down on the grassy bank, and plucked and pulled to pieces the wild flowers, as absent youths are apt to do, and looked up to the sailing clouds in rapt reverie, how he would muse on that significant anointing as a dream! But God was in it. "Thou," the shepherd lad would say to himself—"Thou, the mighty Lord, the Shepherd of the sun, and moon, and stars—Thou, the God of Israel, didst anoint, not any of my brothers—not Eliab, or Abinadab, or Shammah, or the younger ones—but *me*, the youngest of them all. 'Thou didst anoint *mine head with oil*'—not merely such as I might pour upon my hair at a shepherds' feast, but the same as Samuel poured upon the temples of King Saul."

*David had been anointed to kingship.*

But what is that to us? Much. Let eleven centuries and more pass away; and now go from Bethlehem-Judah to an island called Patmos, a place

most stern and desolate—rock-built, with a few peaked hills, only a little relieved by scanty vegetation. A Roman galley has taken a prisoner there. Those dells have often heard the sighs of broken hearts; and he might well sigh heart-broken as others have done, but that he has prospects of release, of honour, and of glory which they had not. As he sits by the surge-beaten shore and water-dripping rocks, he not only knows that One who once walked the waters visibly beholds him in his loneliness, looking down with care and love; as he sees the sun in the early morning lift up its lamp above the shadowy hills, he not only knows that an eye brighter than the sun rests upon all his ways, but he sees above the rocks and mountains a throne, and above the stars a crown, reserved for him; and he sings there a song, which he has written down for us all to learn—“Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” Carefully observe, *this* is not one of heaven’s songs; it is a song for earth. It was but the song of an exile and a captive. It was the song, not of one whose



warfare was accomplished, but of one who was still fighting the battle of faith ; not of one who already wore the diadem of celestial glory, but of one whose only hold on it at the time was with the hand of hope.

A resemblance, then, may be traced between the psalmist David and John the Divine, inasmuch as both, when they sung their holy songs, were kings not yet crowned. And even if David were to be mainly regarded as an uncrowned representative of earth's potentates, he may still, in relation to his spiritual character, be identified as something more ; while John, in the regal claim his words assert, could only use them in the Christian sense, and can be regarded as no other than a type of the whole kingly race springing from Him of whose creative royalty it is said, " He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand." All Christians are kings, even as all Christians are priests ; but kings only anointed, not yet crowned, as they are priests ordained, not yet admitted to celestial ministries ; and though the ordination to priestly service be now the more prominent honour, it is not such as to dis-



trust or overshadow the kingly name and destiny. Should it strike any as a wild stretch of imagination to call poor, humble working people, such as we see sitting round Christ's table at His Supper—*kings*; to call servants and peasants—*kings*; to call that old man working in the union-house garden, in pauper's dress, and that apprentice lad struggling with difficulties and privations—*kings*;—really, after all, it is only the application of calm faith to the interpretation of the character and destination of all these humble folks, assuming that they are genuine believers in Christ. If outward appearance in the case of David, however it might seem to contradict his conviction and his hope, did not in the least actually militate against them; neither are the social circumstances and position of any of us, however humble, any bar to the entertainment of this noble idea and this sublime aspiration. If the song of the "kings and priests unto God" be led, as it is, by a prisoner at Patmos, more meanly clad, perhaps, than many a poor Englishman, and worn down with ruder toil, with scantier meals, and the victim of more brutal insults, and altogether in a more sorrowful estate—if

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that slave be leader of the choir of all the royal and sacerdotal singers in God's Church, then assuredly no outward accidents of human life can prevent any from joining in the Apostle John's wondrous hymn of Christian hope.

A Christian's prospect of future life is of surpassing grandeur. David might exaggerate the glory of the crown of Israel; we cannot exaggerate the glory of the crown of Zion. Our imagination is incompetent to picture future blessedness. That subject will ever transcend imagination.

*David had been anointed from on high.*

Many a youth of noble blood has been marked out or recognised by his father or his brothers, or by an enthusiastic nation, for the honours of royalty, but he has never attained the promised prize. It has been seized by one more fortunate. Perhaps he has been smitten down by death, the victim of malice or accident, long before the appointed day of inauguration. David's crown was a sure one, and surer than that already worn by Saul; and so is every Christian's. Man's projects and schemes are like the flowers of the field—like the billows of the sea; but God's purposes in providence and grace are

sure as the seasons and the sun. The kingship of every believer rests not on his own might or wisdom—not on the counsel and plans of his fellow-men, but on the irreversible and sovereign grace and love of God.

*David had been anointed to present rule as well as future honour.*

He had forthwith to rule himself as a preparation for ruling others. One of his earliest lessons, after this Divine appointment, was the lesson of self-control; and before he had to rule the thousands of Israel, he had to rule, as chieftain, some rabble troops. In the wilderness of Engedi, he was preparing to be king in the city of Jerusalem. The discipline of the sheepfold was good, and so was the discipline of the desert. I have often thought, the putting and keeping in order of those wild, ruffian-like men, who fled to the standard at the cave of Adullam, must have been a good kind of education for the duties of royalty, when the kingdom was established, and the key of the whole nation's government was carried on the shepherd's shoulder.

In that period of exile, amidst his struggles and his sorrows, his rude companions, the rough life he



led, the calls to generosity which he heard and answered, and the sufferings and wrongs of others which he saw and felt, David was passing through the stages of an education which fitted him to be a careful, considerate, charitable, and large-hearted as well as righteous king. And so God is training us up amidst our difficulties, mortifications, and embarrassments, for future service—perhaps exaltation and honour here—without which present training we might abuse His coming gifts, as, without the schooling of a desert life, David might have turned out another Saul. And most certainly the whole of our earthly history, which is a wilderness one—compared with the new history to open when death is over—causes us to have to do, like David, with people in greater trouble than ourselves, who come and join us that they may get our sympathy and help. The whole of such a life is meant to inspire feelings, and lead to acts, and establish habits, and lay up within us an experience, which will fit us for what we are to be, and what we are to do, when the wilderness shall be left for ever. Even more: we have right kingly work to do before we are crowned. We have to put an end to confusion, to establish

order, to enforce laws. Some have a work of this sort to do in their families ; there is a little community where the father should be a king and the mother a queen, and children and servants subjects, kept in obedience and peace by the strong hand of wisdom and love. And all have a still smaller realm, yet one more difficult to govern—"He that ruleth his spirit, is stronger than he that taketh a city."

Oh, what confusion there is in our souls ! What divided interests ! What contending parties ! What tumults and civil wars ! What need of strength to quell and subdue rebellion, to bring the thoughts and imaginations into obedience, to place all under the authority of a regal will, thoroughly sanctified, bowing down to the supreme and perfect will enthroned in heaven ! Depend on it, this inward order will never come but as the result of devout submission to God's revealed law, nor will that be either comprehended or enforced without fervent prayer. It will be something gained, if we get the feeling that we have a kingly office to discharge here in our inmost souls, adopting as our own the prayer—while we feel the inward confusion that makes it so appropriate—"Unite my heart to

“Fear Thy name”—and assured that, if we would have prosperity in the commonwealth of our spiritual nature, it is to be secured by imitating David in his after-life, and enthroning the ark of God’s covenant in the midst of it, as upon a holy hill.

*David was anointed of the Spirit.*

It is a remarkable incident, recorded in the history we have noticed, that when Samuel anointed David in the midst of his brethren, the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward, not only, we apprehend, as the Spirit of inspiration, but in other ways and methods; adding to intellectual impulse and devotional excitement—such as produced psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs—“the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.”

How can we here help connecting the incident of David’s unction by the Spirit with the apostle’s words—“Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts?” This gospel truth derives illustration from the history of the shepherd king. As

establishment in Christ finds a typical parallel in the Divine purpose with regard to David, and the Divine anointing to be kings meets its pictorial counterpart in the story of the famous unction-scene at Bethlehem-Ephratah; so also the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts has a corresponding circumstance in the outpouring of the Spirit on David from that day forward. While the inspiration of the youthful shepherd fitted him for his work as singer and sage, it no less fitted him for his work as sovereign; and so the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in faithful hearts, as the Spirit of light and love, of adoption and sanctity, is equally a Spirit of order and rule—teaching Christians how to govern themselves and put down sin in the world, and pointing them out, though crownless now, as heirs of a royalty which shall endure for evermore. And here we learn how we may decide whether there be laid up for us the glory which fadeth not away. Have we the *earnest* of the Spirit in our hearts? Do we walk in the Spirit, and live in the Spirit? Has the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made us free from the law of sin in our members? Are we spiritually-minded, which

is life and peace? Without the earnest of the inheritance, we are destitute of all personal title to the heavenly diadem. We are, like David's elder brethren, passed by; and yet not, as they were, by a will acting independently of them, but by our own will, perverse and obstinate. We reject the proffered crown and throne. Some younger brother, perhaps, is preferred before us. The last is first—the first last.


*David was anointed in secret.*

Certainly the anointing of David was not a public act. There was no gathering of the nation—no proclamation throughout the land in the places of concourse. It is said that he was anointed “in the midst of his brethren”—which does not necessarily mean that the thing was done in their presence. The words have been rendered, “in the close proximity of his brethren.” It is probable that the unction was administered in the greatest privacy; that the prophet took the young shepherd aside into a recess—an inner room—or even to a little distance in the fields. Certainly the brothers do not appear to have known David's destiny. Josephus says, “Samuel sat down to the feast, and placed



the youth under him ; and Jesse also, and his other sons ; after which, he took oil, in the presence of David, and anointed him, and whispered into his ear, and acquainted him that God chose him to be king." The anointing of Saul was secret : " And as they were going down to the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us, (and he passed on,) but stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God." We are persuaded the anointing of David was not more public than that.

Mark, in contrast, the public anointing of the young king : " So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron ; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before the Lord : and they anointed David king over Israel." And also the proclamation concerning Solomon, when David, having become an old man, called the servants to his bed-chamber, and said, " Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon, my son, to ride upon mine own mule, and bring him down to Gihon ; and let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel : and blow ye with the trumpet, and



say, God save king Solomon." And from the quiet death-chamber, the history conducts us into the public streets, where crowds are gathered to welcome the new sovereign—"And all the people came up after him, and the people piped with pipes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth rent with the sound of them." And beside all this, there is a wonderful story of the little boy Jehoash, preserved in the bed-chamber, and hid in the house of the Lord for six years, to save him from the machinations of the infamous usurping queen, Athaliah, and then at last brought out to be crowned by Jehoiada. Couple the spectacle of a public coronation with the scene of a private anointing—the popular shout with the prophetic whispering—and are you not reminded of the manifestation of the sons of God—the regal enthronement of the heirs of heaven, touching which the secret unction presents at once a contrast and a preparation? Our "life is *hid* with Christ in God." There is a Divine whispering in the ear, not overheard, yet anything but delusive; no dream, but a rich reality; gentle as the murmur of the little brook, yet sublime as the blast which shakes the forest and makes the hills

tremble. The whispering is of words like these—  
“Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love ;  
therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.”  
“Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and  
the earth is my footstool ; all those things hath mine  
hands made, and all those things have been, saith the  
Lord : but to this man will I look, even to him that  
is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at  
my word.” “Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in  
the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the  
hand of thy God.”

*David was anointed with the oil of joy.*

The thought of Israel's crown could not but bring  
care over the heart of the young shepherd ; but to  
one of his patriotic, unselfish cast of soul—to one  
with whose generous impulses there was blended  
a noble ambition, the prospect would yield gladness.  
Oil was a symbol of joy. Among the beautiful gifts  
of nature, David enumerates these—“He causeth the  
grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the ser-  
vice of man : that he may bring forth food out of  
the earth, and wine that maketh glad the heart of  
man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread  
which strengtheneth man's heart.” And Isaiah, in

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the name of the great Comforter of the distressed, sung that hymn which tells of His being anointed to preach glad tidings, "to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

The symbol, indeed, is lost sight of in the thing symbolised, in that beautiful passage which proclaims—"And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." As we reflect on the prophecy, we see the multitude of the exiles coming back to their own land and their own city, "upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts,"—we see them coming over the hills, and down the valleys, and up the rocky sides of Zion—entering the wide-open gates with the clangour of trumpets, and the music of harps, and the swell of human voices; and their garments are clean, and pure, and bright; and their beards are trimmed, and their heads are shining and fragrant with fresh oil. And a parable is all that of the procession and march of God's

holy and chosen people from their earthly captivity to their heavenly home, the city whence come their freedom, their dignity, and their joy. "The joy of the Lord is our strength." "We joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the atonement," or reconciliation. There are at least many hours in the Christian pilgrimage when we can put aside the cup of myrrh, and aloes, and gall, and strip off the weeds of sorrow, and shake the ashes from our heads. It is an untruthful and monstrous view to present a religious life as though it were, all the way through, a funeral march. Let us sympathise with David's faith and devotion, and believe with Paul in the glad tidings; and then we shall be constrained to join with the one in this happy, cheerful song, and to obey the command of the other, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." Fear and grief enfeeble the soul; despondency paralyses effort; but joy exhilarates the affections and nerves the will. A man in an agony of grief may indeed make one desperate endeavour; but habitual melancholy unstrings the energies of the soul and is death to action. Cheerfulness makes the ready servant and the useful son. The summer

sunlight, not the winter evening's frost, is best for work. "I will run in the way of thy commandments"—When? Lashed by the whip of fear—pierced by the goad of emulation—drawn by the lure of reward—driven by the reins of self-will? No; but "*when* thou shalt *enlarge* my heart." It was joy that induced Moses to exclaim, "We are journeying unto the land concerning which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." It was joy inspired David to say, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul." It was joy that lightened the heart and made so elastic the step of the woman of Samaria, when she left her water-pot at the well, and ran into the city, saying, "Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?" It was joy which anointed the heads of the apostles and shone on their faces, when they exclaimed, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." .

Finally, we cannot refrain from alluding to the second anointing of David, when the men of Judah came and made him king over Judah, and the

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glorious ascension which followed that anointing, and the triumphal entrance of the king with the ark of the covenant into the tabernacle of Mount Zion, as a type of His unction and His ascension, before whom the cry went, "Lift up your heads O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors and the King of glory shall come in." "Thy God hath anointed *Thee* with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows." In all things He hath the pre-eminence—as in sorrow, so in joy; but the joy is more selfish than the sorrow. It is not exclusive though surpassing. He gives His people to share in His blessedness; for, indeed, it was their salvation that was the joy set before Him. There is no more of selfishness in Him on the throne than there was on the cross; and whatever we may say of His own glory as the end of His purposes, never let us use a syllable inconsistent with the truth of His infinitely disinterested love. He received His anointing that others might receive theirs. Blessed union! blessed unction! "It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments."

XI.

The Overflowing Cup.

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"My cup runneth over."—PSALM xxiii. 5




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A THOUSAND times it has been shewn that Almighty God has manifested a broad and deep benevolence in the constitution of human nature and the outward world. Vast stores of knowledge have been applied to the illustration of the fact, and the further knowledge goes in the investigation, the plainer looks the truth. Yet, after all, it requires no great power of observation, no large acquaintance with the researches of science, to see that God has given to man a cup which will hold large measures of enjoyment, and that He has supplied streams sufficient to fill the cup to overflowing.

It can plainly be made out, that, according to the provisions of God in nature, there is an abundant supply of all man needs to make his condition here, physically considered, pleasant and satisfactory. Divine benevolence has done its part ; but man and society have created disorder, confusion, and misery ;

and their misdoings lie at the bottom of the main part of all human want. It is not that the earth is unfruitful, that nature is niggard in her stores, or that God has not given man power and skill to make the most of the resources of creation ; but political economy is at fault, and idleness, crime, and vice add a thousand miseries to those which have before grown out of ignorance. A vigorous and tasteful writer has told us of the " Five Gateways of Knowledge," and has beautifully shewn how the senses of man are ministers to the cultivation of his intellect and the perception of beauty, as well as to the animal wants of the body. And we may, in harmony with the figure of the Psalmist, speak of external nature, and of the five senses, as a five-fold fountain, with as many channels for the constant replenishing of our earthly condition with what is adapted to afford us gratification and delight. It is remarkable how one person has a taste for one kind of enjoyment, and another for another, while a few have a comprehensiveness of susceptibility which enables them to derive enjoyment from all. There are lower kinds of pleasure which can with safety be only *sparingly* tasted. The higher may be more largely



enjoyed. Form and colour in nature and art, melody and harmony in music and song, what ministers of joy they are to many a mortal! One can conceive a state of existence in every respect the same as this actual world, only not inclusive of any keen and refined insight into gracefulness of form or splendour of hue, nor inclusive of any musical consciousness at all. What streams of delight would be thereby cut off from many! Out of some cups it would take full one-half.

There are persons, and they are not few, who can sincerely exclaim, "Thank God for my sense of the beautiful, for the enjoyment of flowers, the deliciousness of sounds, the sight of the landscape, the hearing of the birds' song, and of 'such as have a pleasant voice, and can play on an instrument.' How the hill and dale, the field and woodland, the cattle grazing on the pastures, the ships sailing on the sea, the white, fleecy clouds and the azure sky, the bars and masses of many-coloured light piled up in the horizon at sunset—how often have these calmed and soothed my spirit!—while music, in more ways than I can tell, has been to me what David's harp was to the distracted Saul!"

Nature is open, abundant, profuse. Why, then, all the misery there is in the world? Why the multifiform wretchedness of our great cities and our rural districts?

If I were to follow out this part of my subject in figurative language, I should say that the wretched thirst so many feel arises, not from want of cups, nor because God has not provided for the filling them, but because men will do these four following things:—first, They break their cups; secondly, They upset their cups; thirdly, They pour poison in their cups; and, fourthly, They drink their cups till they are drunk. The cup which God would fill for some people, they break—that is, by their vices they totally destroy their capacity for enjoyment. That which He would fill for others, they upset and spill by their extravagance and folly. That which He does supply is, by another class, dashed with poison, through the indulgence of miserable tempers and dispositions; while, again, in some cases, literally, in many more virtually, *intoxication*, (i.e., intemperance in the use of what will yield true enjoyment only when tasted in moderation) is the bane and curse of their whole existence.

But whatever question may arise with regard to some poor creatures, there can be no doubt as to most who may be reading what we say, that the words of David trully describe their condition. We have scarcely passed the season of Christmas, and, as we sit in our quiet homes, by the sparkling fireside, surrounded by what are called the comforts of life; in the enjoyment of health, conjugal affection, and children's love; the well-spread table by our side, the ringing laugh of merry young ones in our ears; the days of "auld lang syne" passing through our memory; the romantic tale, or the sacred story kindling our imagination; while round all that centre of home-bliss there is drawn a beautiful circle of friendship and brotherhood; do not our hearts swell with love and praise to the Author of all good as we are constrained to exclaim, "My cup runneth over?"

We have already indicated that what disturbs the balance of demand and supply, of want and gratification, in reference to man, on the one hand, and God, on the other, is not any deficiency of beneficence in the latter, but solely the follies and the sins of the former; and even for these follies and

sins God has provided a remedy. There is something which can set all right in the individual man. There is something which can set all right in the relationships between him and his Maker. There is something of a nature and a tendency to set all right between the individual and society, and between both and God.

In some old towns in England, in most upon the Continent, you will find quaint, antique buildings in the market-places or public squares, with a large cistern into which pure, sparkling water is ever flowing ; and very pleasant does it look on a bright summer's morning, when the busy housewives, with their vessels, are pressing round to fill them. And so of old, Greek virgins went to the fountains with their pitchers—and, in older times, Hebrew maidens did the same, and none of us can ever forget the story of her who said, "Drink ; and I will give thy camels drink also." Now, I believe that every man, and woman, and child, in this Christian land, has had placed near him by God a fountain out of which he may fill his cup as full as ever Greek or Hebrew did their vessels.


That fountain is the gospel. And most likely not

a few who have followed us through these musings on the twenty-third psalm, know as well as we do what a spring of life and joy that is. They have found Jesus at the well, and heard Him say, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." "Whosoever drinketh of this water, shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." And they have said in reply, "Lord, give me this water, that I thirst not," and He has given it them. And they have tasted of forgiveness and peace, of hope and joy, through believing; and what they have received, all may receive. And if still they thirst from unsupplied spiritual wants, it is neither God's fault nor the gospel's.

The adaptation of the same gospel to social necessities is not so obvious; and its actual bearing on mankind at large soon becomes complicated with political and economical questions. But still, when we look at the spirit of justice, of generosity, of




mutual confidence, of forgiveness, of love, which the gospel inculcates, it is evident that, when the gospel takes hold of men in general, it will put that in the heart which will set the head right in relation to a good many perplexing social problems. Slavery, despotism, electioneering bribery and corruption, selfish combinations of class against class, aristocratic pride, democratic insolence, trade dishonesty, professional dishonourableness ; all these things, which disturb and curse the social world—the gospel is dead against them. Let the gospel have its way and it will shew them no quarter. And, moreover, besides the right dispositions for the settlement of social difficulties, the gospel gives hints, and lays down maxims, and raises suggestions, which, taken up and pondered by wise heads, would, under the impulses of strong hearts, eminently serve towards the unravelling of entanglements, which now so sadly embarrass politicians and philanthropists. The gospel has not done for individuals all that it can do—for society not a hundredth part.

The gospel, like nature, reveals its treasures only by degrees, as men search into it—leaving in it,  and power unsearchable.

Adam little thought, when he walked in paradise, what a world God had provided for him—what riches lay hid in the mine, what fruitfulness was folded up in the germ, what wonders posterity would do with the things that were piled up in the manifold chambers of this great storehouse! And so the first Christians, the men of Pentecost, little thought what a gospel it was that God had sent them—what wisdom and love, what light and life, it would pour forth from age to age on believing, thoughtful, studious, earnest souls. From the beginning of the world have men been finding out what a wonderful world this is; and from the beginning of the gospel men have been finding out what a wonderful gospel it is. Not without thoughtful labour do we get at the riches of the earth, nor without thoughtful labour do we get at the riches of Divine truth. The door will not open at the first knock. The fountain will not gush up unless you bore deep. The very surface of the gospel is bright and inviting; but one who gives only a hasty glance at it can have no adequate idea of what it contains. A few words of mercy taken out of it come with wonderful effect on the

mind of an awakened sinner; but that first blush of its beauty is little like the depth of power, glory, and excellence it reveals after a lifetime of faith and experience. It takes years to find out what the gospel can do for an individual. What peace, purity, consolation, it can give! A believer is always finding out some new and beautiful use to which the gospel can be put; and then, when all is done—when he has tried it for years, and comes at last to stand on the brink of eternity—he is sure to say, “I never saw so much of the glory of the gospel as I do now.” Earthly good looks dimmer and poorer the nearer we get to the grave; but heavenly good looks clearer, richer, brighter, as we approach the other world. It has taken generations to find out what the gospel can do for the world, for society, for civilisation. Much remains undiscovered. There are *veins* in it which, with all our mining skill, we have not yet come across—materials for use, capacities of adaptation, which, with all our inventive and ingenious power, we have not developed and employed. We wonder sometimes what the great agencies of nature—steam and electricity, for example—may yet do for



man : there is vastly more scope for wonder as to what the gospel may yet do for man.

Besides the miseries which men have brought upon themselves, individually or socially, by their misconduct, there are calamities which do befall us that we cannot trace to the same source. Though every kind of sorrow which comes on humanity may be ascribed to the coming of sin into the world, yet there are kinds of sorrow we have to endure which are not chargeable on any personal delinquencies, or on any social disorders. Many diseases, many accidents, many pains, overtake us, quite independently of ourselves or others. No power can ward them off. But, then, mark ! Amidst them all, out of the gospel the believer can fill his cup with consolation.

What are more familiar to you than comforts supplied out of the Bible to afflicted souls ? As soon as ever we touch on the topic, you can anticipate what we are going to say. You know just as well what the promises of the gospel are as you know what water is. The character of commonplace attaching to these means of Christian solace and support is really a most precious distinction ;

and what makes it so difficult for us to dwell on the subject without being tedious arises solely out of the fact of your already possessing in your own minds such sources of spiritual consolation.

*The psalmist's words are the utterance of a sentiment.*

It is very important that we should distinguish between the *fact* of a full cup, and the *acknowledgment* of its being full. Some people, whose cup is brimming over, will never admit it. They fancy other people's are, but not their own. They look with envy upon the circumstances of their neighbours, and are ever deploring their own ill fate; while they themselves are regarded by their neighbours after a similar fashion, and the would-be objects of commiseration are actually objects of envy. Discontented, unhappy people! They are carrying a source of wretchedness in their own souls, and are ever throwing the dark shadow of themselves over nature and providence. They are always hankering after what they have not got—making other folk's prosperity an obstacle to their own—and feeding their diseased hearts on the food of jealousy, as Haman did when he cried, "All this

availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

There are desires, like the hungry soil, which you may till and till, but never reap a crop—like sand, that sucks up water—like Bunyan's slough of despond, into which you might fling loads and loads, but it could never be filled up. A man may have all that heart can wish—may be like Solomon, with his gardens and fountains, and then go up and down, amidst the grandeur which the passer-by so earnestly covets, sighing, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." 'Tis not a profusion of wealth and luxury which evokes a cry like David's. Many and many a monarch there has been who would never have uttered the words, except in the opposite sense to that in which he meant them. "Un-easy lies the head that wears a crown!" and the unhappy Spanish monarch, John, on his deathbed, lamented "that he had not been born the son of a mechanic, instead of king of Castile."

No, no; it is not the man who has got in his hand a huge goblet of gold, full of the wine of this world's wealth and pleasure, that is most likely to sing our song. Many poor peasants and widows

have made it their own, who, some of us would have thought, had more to complain of than to rejoice in. I must confess that, in my pastoral experience, I have met with stronger expressions of contentment among the poor than among the rich. I have called at a cottage, and seen a lonely creature sitting by a scanty fire, and an ill-spread table; and when I have been ready to condole—out there have come from the lips, welling up from a full heart, such expressions of content and enjoyment as have covered me with shame. Then, perhaps, I have made another call, where there have been signs of affluence; and yet, if the restraints of society had allowed it, I should have said something in the way of commiseration—for there was that in tone, manner, and expression of countenance, which too plainly indicated a heart ill at ease.

For the thousandth time let it be said, 'Tis not outward circumstances which make any of us happy; and that a heathen poet found out ages since. The state of the inward soul is the secret of this sentiment. Let there be but a deep sense of one's own unworthiness, a large acquaintance with the

experience of others, deep religious feeling, simple Christian faith, habitual prayer, and the enjoyment of a present living Christ, together with the cultivation of habits of activity and usefulness, and, beyond all doubt, sympathy in David's joyful song will be the happy result.

I say again, there is nothing like hard work, sanctified by religion, to make people happy. You may see the inheritor of a castle lounging lazily after dinner upon cushions of velvet, sipping his wine without the slightest relish—while the peasant from one of his cottages at the hillfoot, carrying a heavy burden to his lord's gate, will stop and drink of the running brook with a gusto which the great man in his pride might envy. I have often rejoiced, and perhaps wondered too, at the merry-heartedness of Alpine porters, carrying what would have crushed me to the earth, over steep and rugged mountain-passes, enlivening their journey with hearty songs, and filling their leather cups from the rill or the snowdrift, as though it had been the nectar of the gods.

The bounty David appreciated filled his heart. One figure runs into another, and when we think of the



cups without, (of the cisterns and vessels of comfort and gratification which God has filled *around* us—like the water-pots of stone at the marriage-feast of Cana,) we can hardly help going on to think of the heart itself as a cup, which, out of God's supplies, gets brimful of joy. God has provided in the very constitution of our nature for our rejoicing. He has given us a capacity for it—a receptive power. Some hearts are vessels of profound depth and large circumference, others of lesser magnitude, but the scantiest can hold much. Nor should it be forgotten that the affections, as well as the intellect, are capable of development, and that the little cup may dilate into a large reservoir.

And what is it that fills the heart fullest with joy? It is love; for love enlarges the heart while it fills it—deepens and widens it, as the glorious waterfall does the rock-bed into which it plunges down. Selfishness contracts the heart, and makes it like an old goatskin bottle that has been shrivelled up by long hanging amidst hot smoke. And suspicion, and envy, and jealousy are always beating heavy blows against the heart which they have to carry; and so the vessel gets starred, and cracked, and

split, and becomes unfit for holding the wine of joy. But let love be the heart's cupbearer, and then it will be saved many a fracture; and the heart so carried and cared for will be a vessel firm as crystal, and yet possess a mysteriously expansive power—for which you may defy nature to supply a comparison—and ever getting fuller as it is getting larger.

*The psalmist's words suggest to us a lesson.*

Let us remember *Who* has filled the cup.

All the blessings we have been contemplating are to be connected with Him who is the fountain of living waters. Everything comes from the "midst of the throne." "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." Nature and providence are only other names for the Almighty; and, as to spiritual influences bestowed on moral beings, they have in them an immediate directness from God to man unparalleled by the production and bestowment of material gifts. God and the soul come nearer together than God and the star, or God and the sun. High as those glorious luminaries float and flash in the firmament, they come not into such close contact with the Father of lights as do the minds which dwell far below them in the realms of space.

Notwithstanding this, we have such a mischievous habit of overlooking the connexion between what we enjoy and the Being who gives us all things—we so often go whole days without an intelligent recognition of our Divine Benefactor—our morning and evening prayers, to say nothing of “grace before meat,” are so commonly dead forms, that it requires a thoughtful and earnest effort to rise to the experience of real Christian gratitude. We must fight against this tendency of our fallen hearts, and bind together the thoughts of our mercies with the thoughts of our Father, and “take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.”

Let us think of another cup, of which we may truly say, had it not been *emptied*, ours had not been filled.

We shall not enter here into any critical inquiry as to what our blessed Lord meant by the *cup* which He prayed might pass from Him; but most assuredly, by His agony in the garden, and by His death upon the cross, He did taste the bitterest of potions, He did drink the very dregs of anguish. And if “it became Him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons

to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings"—if the perfecting of His captainship, as the Lord, and Guide, and Preserver of souls, involved the moral necessity of His being the Man of Sorrows—then plainly, not only do the great gifts of pardon and regeneration, and all their concomitants, usually called gospel blessings, come to us as immediate consequences of His cross and passion, but all other benefactions included in the temporal protection and support of the "many sons" on their way to glory, must be regarded as in close dependence on the mediatorial work of the Son of God. All good bestowed upon sinners partakes of the nature of salvation; and from beginning to end *that* requires, as the condition of its bestowment, the self-sacrifice of the Mediator of the new covenant. These truths, implied in the Scripture teaching of the facts of redemption, throw a light over the whole field of providence, presenting it under an aspect which only Christian faith can see. All the love streaming upon us everywhere is beheld proceeding from *God in Christ*, "reconciling the world to Himself." In short, there are two cups standing between Christ and the sinner—that of

death and that of salvation, and the first must be emptied that the second may be filled.

Let us pour out a *libation* before the Lord.

We are told that "when the priest poured the drink-offerings upon the altar, he always caused the cup in which the wine was measured to overflow, to denote the free and liberal disposition in which it was dedicated." So should it be with our libations of worship, whether private, domestic, or social. Far removed from what is stinted and niggardly, let us, in the service of song and prayer, be ashamed of a half-empty chalice, let us yield back in measure according to the large-heartedness shewn in what we have already received.

And in the consecration of our substance be it the same. David, as he thought of God's overflowing cup, made his own like it. "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great,

and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee. . . . I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee."

David does not speak like a man who had a tax to pay, but as one who had a privilege to enjoy, and could not be restrained in his gifts, so happy was he to return a little to Him who had conferred so much. In the giving of some people, there is nothing like the pouring out of a full cup before the Lord; yet who can soberly doubt, that a man most ready to empty it in holy service, is just the one who is most likely to have it always full? And do not wine and water need each to be often changed, since they become flat or stagnant, when either is long kept without the emptying and refilling of the vessel? The selfish and miserly hold

what God gives till it becomes mouldy and useless. There were jars in the ruins of Nineveh that belonged to Sennacherib's cellars, with only a little dust in them. It is the same with jars at Pompeii. In an incomparably shorter time, the wine of earthly blessings turns to dust in the stores of the covetous. I do not forget, that while honesty is the best policy, he who acts on that principle is not an honest man ; and, in the same way, that while bountifulness is its own reward, he who gives that he may be repaid is not generous ; but still, when we have made a sacrifice, it is a comfort to us to reflect on the munificent laws of Heaven, and it is right to hold up to the selfish the consequences of their own policy.

Let us *hand round* the cup. Do good unto all men—visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction—and quietly reflect on the sixth chapter of Luke, the thirty-first and seven following verses :—

“And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye ? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good

to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."

Let us finish by thinking of the story of the good woman who had only a handful of meal in a barrel and a little oil in a cruse; and a prophet asked her to make him thereof a little cake *first*, and bring it unto him, and *after* that to make for herself and her son. "And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, *and her house*,



*did eat many days.* And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah."

## XII.

### The Two Angels.

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“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.”—PSALM **xxiii.** 6.



IN a popular work of fiction, the author represents a father saying to his son, "Everybody who is in earnest to be good carries two fairies about with him—one *here*," and he touched the boy's heart, "and one *here*," and he touched his head ; and, no doubt, thought and affection will do wonders. Intelligence and love will have a transforming witchery, and put us on doing, and enable us to accomplish much which at first would seem marvellous as fairy work. But, better far, there are two angels sent by God to follow all earnest servants of the Divine will to their journey's end—*Goodness and Mercy*.

They are alike—both of them celestial, both of them Divine ; being, in fact, attributes and perfections of the Almighty. They are forms of love, and that not only in the sense in which all the moral qualities of the infinite Creator are so, but forms of love inasmuch as they bring salvation and comfort into a world of sin. Truth and Righteousness, both

celestial, both Divine, are also forms of love, in relation to innocent and holy beings—following guiltless creatures in many loving ways. But if only Truth and Righteousness came down from the throne of God to deal with men upon the earth, their bright armour would fill us with dismay, and we should fear their swords more than we should trust their shields. If only Truth and Righteousness followed us, how should we be able to endure their stern frowns at our want of sympathy with them?—how endure the sentence they would pronounce against our manifold misdoings? But when they are associated with Goodness and Mercy, it is otherwise. The former are indeed with us in the government of God, which could not go on without them; but the latter are also with us, for in that same government Mercy and Truth meet together; Righteousness and Peace kissed each other long ago, and became one, by virtue of the mediation, death, and obedience of Jesus Christ. How all four, hand in hand, do follow us—Righteousness as right as ever, and Truth as truthful as ever—their claims met, their demands satisfied, by Goodness and Mercy! But Goodness and Mercy, following next upon the steps of the




human traveller, walking nearest to him whom they guard and bless, are most prominently seen. Yet ever their shoulders are beheld the majestic forms of the other two, with their radiant panoply, and their star-tipped spears.

Goodness and Mercy are alike—yet are they distinct, and somewhat different. Goodness is benevolence in the largest sense ; it is kind thinking, kind feeling, kind doing towards all creatures. Mercy is benevolence in a stricter sense, as regarding sinful beings who have forfeited Divine favour, and exposed themselves to righteous punishment. Goodness has a sphere in heaven, no less than upon earth, and there it goes round with its cup of blessings—and there it scatters its richest gifts among the cherubim and the seraphim. But Mercy's sphere is earth, not heaven. It has to do, not with the sons of God, but with the sons of Adam. There was Goodness before there was any sin, and Goodness was active before any creature fell ; but not till after sin appeared, was Mercy revealed—not till after transgression had brought guilt and misery upon our race, was Mercy needed in the way she now comes to minister. Goodness was with Adam and Eve in

paradise, shining on them through sun and stars, smiling on them through trees and flowers, spreading for them tables of plenty, filling their hearts with food and gladness ; but Mercy came when the serpent-tempter had succeeded, and the forbidden fruit had been eaten, and the descending curse was darkening Eden, and the guilty pair stood shivering in the presence of their holy Judge. Goodness ministered to the man Christ Jesus—the perfect man, the ideal of humanity embodied in substantial form in life and deed—it watched over His childhood, brought Him away from Herod, and up from Egypt; was with Him in the wilderness and the garden, and threw its glory over the Mount of Transfiguration; nor was it wholly concealed in the eclipse on Calvary. But Mercy ministered not to Jesus—He stood in no need of it. It never brought Him a cup nor whispered a consolation. It accompanied Him but as a messenger to others—a bearer of His precious gifts to those whom He redeemed.

Goodness belongs to nature and to Providence. It presides over all the resources of creation—opens the mine, and covers the field, and adorns the garden—pours out daily the treasures of its full horn



into the hands of men. What Goodness giveth, they gather. But Mercy belongs especially to the gospel; she is seen walking along the paths of patriarchs, prophets, and priests—in the tabernacle and in the temple, in worship and in teaching—giving them hints about the Seed of the woman, and the Sceptre of Israel, and the Star of Jacob, and the Man of Sorrows, and the Lamb slain, and the Fountain opened; and then, after this typical and prophetic course, Mercy shews us, at Bethlehem, Christ's manger and cradle; and then at Calvary, reveals the cross under which she stands.

“God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” There is Mercy. “In the fulness of time, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.” There is Mercy. Goodness follows every sinner from the womb to the grave—follows him in his earliest, tottering steps, follows him to school, follows him in all his after-works and ways, follows him in his joys and his sorrows, follows him into the sick-chamber, and stands over him as he gives up the ghost;



and Mercy also is with him all the while, for Goodness could not stay with a sinner without Mercy too. Yet Mercy's special work is when the sinner turns to God through Christ, and then Mercy comes with a pardon, to open the prison-door, to strike off every chain, and to heal, to clothe, to educate, and to ennoble.

The *constancy* of these two angels is in harmony with their character. "Goodness and Mercy shall follow me *all* the days of my life." Their constancy, indeed, is part of their character. Human friends are proverbially inconstant,—even brothers often fail in time of need. "My brethren," says Job, "have dealt deceitfully as a brook, and as the streams of brooks they pass away, which are blackish by reason of the ice, and wherein the snow is hid: what time they wax warm, they vanish: when it is hot, they are consumed out of their place." But these two angels are friends who stick closer than a brother. Unlike the deceitful brooks, and the melted snow-water, which Job had seen and moralised upon, Goodness and Mercy resemble the tide which rushed from the smitten rock, and followed the camp of Israel through the desert. Goodness is faithful. When you look behind, you never miss it; or, if you

do, it is only for a moment, and that not because Goodness is gone away, but because you have dust or darkness in your eyes, which hides it. Goodness never leaves the heavens or the earth. It wheels round the seasons, and commands the weather ; and, after we have been complaining of too much or too little rain, or snow, or frost, how wonderfully things come right at last ; and the doubting farmer has to sing at harvest-time, "Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness !"

And Mercy is faithful. "His mercy endureth for ever." "His mercy is everlasting." The mercy of God, as revealed in the gospel, is as constant to the sinner as the law of nature can be constant to the creature.

I know nothing more affecting than a calculation of the possibilities of life. What a multitude of things, such as we daily hear and read of in the newspapers, may happen to us ! Nothing that is possible may not come. A whole list of casualties might be here given, enough to fill us with shrinking and dread, lest the next step should sink us in the grave. Nothing about life, as to its particular circumstances and incidents, is at all certain. What

one may be called to do or to endure to-morrow, nobody knows. But this is as sure as the rising sun, that Goodness and Mercy will ever be the faithful guards of all Christ's flock. Accidents, sicknesses, bereavements, losses, and other dark calamities, may be following me, and may overtake me next year, or next month, or next week, or to-morrow; but that is a "peradventure," a "perhaps." I cannot see them, and it would be foolish to imagine them. But here is something that is no "may be," no imagination. I am sure that, wherever I go, these guardian angels will go with me; whatever else follow, they will not be absent.

This is a blessed conviction amidst life's uncertainties. It is blessed to have this light shining in such a dark place—to have this clue in such a perplexing maze. Let us cherish the conviction, walk in the light, and keep hold of the clue.

The constancy of Goodness and Mercy will be ever needful. Upon Goodness I, as a creature, must be ever dependent; but in this respect I am like all other beings, human and angelic. Upon Divine Mercy, as an imperfect being, and prone to sin, I am peculiarly dependent. I know I shall not

in heaven ; but as long as I am on earth, I fear all. There is so much in humanity which is that it is hard work to root the badness out ; the mischief is, that we have not got the strong indispensable for such rooting out. It is with ry shaky hand, and in a very lazy way, that we the sin-weeds out of our fallen hearts. How grow ! I met, the other day, with a curious in natural history, which may serve to illustrate this. "There is a new water-weed—new in country—which has made its appearance in river Thames, within these ten years. It is a ; very knotted kind of plant, whose growth is prodigious as it is curious. The leaves are beset minute teeth, which cause them to cling ; and y fragment broken off is capable of becoming independent plant, producing roots and stems, extending itself indefinitely in every direction. t water-plants require roots ; but this is indelent altogether of that condition, and actually rs as it travels slowly down the stream, after g cut." I thought, as I read that passage, t a type this water-plant is of the evil in le's hearts ! How that evil grows in the flow-

ing life-stream of depraved humanity! how, after being cut, it grows! how it grows as it travels, making roots for itself as fast as we tear it in pieces! how it has minute teeth, which cause it to cling! and how it sticks to us with a terrible tenacity, and eats its way in with an all-defying bite! In such a case, where such earnest diligence is needed to keep under the evil, where the watchfulness and the toil must be incessant, though we may succeed to a great extent, and do a great deal more to destroy it than can be done with the weed just mentioned, yet fibres of it will remain to plague and trouble us till the end of life. Now, so long as we have any sin, we shall need Divine Mercy—first, to forgive us the past, and next, to strengthen and help us, by God's Holy Spirit, to clear out, as much as is possible, the depravity which keeps lurking within.

With regard to this, the words of David are full of hope: "Goodness and Mercy *shall* follow." There is an anxious, if not a fearful way, of looking at future life—an anxious kind of anticipation, which makes coming days gloomy, and destroys the cheerfulness of the present hour. But nothing of it is


here ; on the contrary, all before us is seen flashing with brightness, for two angels of light are reckoned upon as forming a convoy to the very end of our pilgrimage.

The hope rests on two foundations.

On *experience*. Goodness and Mercy never have failed. They have remained close to the pilgrim in all weathers. David was one who made memory a support of hope. When he stood before Saul and the king was talking to him about his daring to accept the Philistine's challenge, the shepherd boy gave as a reason for his bold adventure :—"Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock : and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth : and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear. . . . The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." Here memory was the feeder of hope. A past exploit was considered a pledge of future victory. Quite right ! In arguing, however, from the past to the future in

relation to the doings and ways of men, we are liable to be deceived, because the caprice and changeableness of men are notorious. But there can be no mistake in basing hope on experience with regard to God, because He changeth not. As these guardian spirits bent over us when we were little children sleeping in the nursery, they will not leave us should we become old and gray-headed, and lie a shrunken load of infirmity upon our deathbeds. As these messengers spake to us words of comfort when our poor hearts sank within us at our first conversion—as they kept close to us that day when we had such a heavy load of duty and care to carry, and we were so conscious of their helping hands behind us then—as they were prompt, in the hour of temptation, to gird on our armour beforehand, and patient to stand by us throughout the heat of that day of battle—so will they be to us friends and helpers, firm and stanch, till our days on earth are done, seeing that Divine Goodness and Mercy must be immutable as the nature of God.

Among the legends of early Rome there is a beautiful story, how, on one occasion, Castor and Pollux, whom the people worshipped, rode at the head of a



chosen band ; and how they were fairer and taller than the children of men, and were in the first bloom of youth, and their horses were white as snow ; and how the enemy fled before them, and were vanquished by a divine power ; and how they disappeared from amidst the army when the conflict was over, and were only seen for a few moments, as the sun went down, by the fountain at the Temple of Vesta in Rome, where they washed away the stains of blood, and told the citizens how a victory had been won. And the feelings of the Romans in after ages, when they thought of this tale of the heroic times, is well expressed by Macaulay in his "Lays :"—


"Unto the great Twin Brethren  
Let all the people throng,  
With chaplets and with offerings,  
With music and with song,  
And pass in solemn order,  
Before the sacred dome,  
Where dwell the great Twin Brethren  
Who fought so well for Rome."

While in substance our memories of Goodness and Mercy are a contrast with those of the old pagan world—for they were false, but ours are true—in effect, they afford a noble comparison ; and not



so exciting to the spirit of chivalry in the breast of a Roman warrior could be the thought of Castor and Pollux, as have often been to the spirit of faith and hope in the breast of the Christian pilgrim the remembrance of Goodness and Mercy.

Hope rests also on *Divine promises*. "Although," as Calvin says, "experience encouraged David to hope, yet his principal stay was the promise which he embraced, and which confirmed Divine blessings to the last." Promises would suffice, even without experience. Were the whole past as dreary as a wet winter's day, still one word from God might suffice to throw sunshine over the future. How steadily does David, in the 119th Psalm, look to the Divine word as a source of comfort! It is not the past which he there dwells upon, but the word. "Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation, according to thy word." "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, for thy word hath quickened me." There are times when all comfort is cut off from the believer, save that which comes from the Divine promise, when past and present are as black



as a stormy night at sea ; but at such times the sight of a promise is as the rising of the moon. How much more, then, when promises come in aid of experience, when memory and faith testify together to the love of God, should the joy of hope fill the heart of the believer, and cause him, with an unflinching hand, to steer the helm of his vessel for the port of heaven !

What are the *inspirations* of this hope ? It should inspire *praise*. That such consolations as we have noticed should awaken praise is plain enough. But are we not defective here ? We sing—

“ When all Thy mercies, O my God !  
My rising soul surveys,  
Transported with the view, I ’m lost  
In wonder, love, and praise.”

But are we transported ? Is this subject like an eagle coming down from its nest to fetch and carry our thoughts and our affections up to heaven ? Does meditation on the Divine Goodness and Mercy bear us away as on wings ? Are we by this view transported, as we have been sometimes by grand and beautiful prospects ? Does the spiritual and divine excite more intensely, as it does more purely, than the natural and the sensible, the grand in form and

the magnificent in colour? Are we lost in wonder? Does surprise at God's Mercy and Goodness to us sinners really drown and swallow up our spirits? Are we lost in love—in grateful emotion—in admiration of the infinite excellence of the Giver of all good? Are we lost in praise—in the devout and joyful celebration of the Lord's ways, the Lord's character, the Lord's glory? Oh, how defective we are in this divine admiration, and in the feeling out of which it springs! What poor harps are the hearts of some of us! How wretchedly out of tune!—how rusty the wires!—how ill-strung at the best! What imperfect and feeble, and often harsh and discordant music it is which we send up to heaven! We find fault with one another's singing at church. What cause has God to find fault with the praise of us all? Miserable as we are sometimes in prayer, we are worse in praise.

This hope should inspire *cheerfulness*. In melancholy hours, when thick clouds come over us, we may get above them, and chase them away, by devoutly pondering this psalm. We paint a picture of ourselves in the future, perhaps in some wild place, some desert spot, some dark valley. But

God adds to the picture these two holy angels of His presence bearing us up, lest we dash our foot against a stone, providing for us a table in the wilderness, and lending us their arms to lean upon when we are ready to fall. Any picture of our future selves may surely be contemplated with cheerfulness, if there be these angelic accompaniments. We need not care where we go with these glorious armour and provision bearers.

This hope should inspire *beneficence*. Goodness is to follow us in more senses than one. While goodness as a gracious attribute of God is our hope, goodness as a human quality, as a sanctified disposition, as a practical habit, is our duty. "I am persuaded," says the apostle, "that ye are full of goodness." "The fruit of the Spirit is goodness." "The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness." Goodness is a large word. It covers a vast meaning—includes all virtue; but especially it suggests the idea of beneficent activity. As God's Goodness is ever doing us good, so our goodness should be ever doing our fellow-creatures good. "My goodness extendeth not to thee, but to the excellent of the earth, in whom is all my delight." We are to "do

good to all men, especially to them that are of the household of faith." The first circle of our goodwill and helpful kindness is to take in fellow-Christians, and the second is to be so large as to take in the world, and embrace every creature. It is to build the hospital, and play the good Samaritan; to bind up the wounded, and to heal the sick; to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction; to scatter alms-gifts, and to achieve alms-deeds; to build chapels, to establish missions, and to send the gospel to the heathen world.

And surely the *recipients of Mercy* should be *ministers of Mercy*; and the Mercy which follows them in Divine bestowment should be the Mercy they follow in human imitation. When He forgives, it is with no reservation. It is not a qualified thing, carrying with it some terrible adjunct, which cuts off from the value of the gift, dimming its lustre and embittering its sweetness; but it is clear, and pure, and rich, and comes streaming down from the heaven of heavens—a flood of light. "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." And thus human mercy is to shew itself without

that cruel abatement—"I can forgive, but not forget." Frank, cordial, hearty, should be every pardon of another's offence; thus carrying the stamp of heaven's mint upon it, and having in it a ring of love, as the coin of God.

God will multiply pardons. For thousands and thousands of years has He been forgiving rebels and acquitting debtors. Think of the pardons which fill a lifetime, the pardons which cover a century, the pardons bestowed on a nation or a race! On the other hand, how soon is our pardoning power exhausted! Some one offends; we forgive him. He offends again; we forgive again. But now the fountain ceases; the water in our mercy's well descends. Yet the Saviour teaches us that merciful love in us is to be the counterpart of the merciful love of our Father in heaven. "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven." Not only do pardons come when the children of men turn to their heavenly Father, saying, "I repent," but while they continue obstinate and rebellious,

He forbears to strike them with the rod of His fierce anger. He is long-suffering, and not willing that any should perish. If that be a model for us, then our wrath is not to be let loose against our enemies until they come and submit themselves, but rather mercy is to curb resentment, and to triumph over judgment. Let no one say, "I will wait till some overture of repentance be made;" for God's method is to anticipate by overtures of forgiveness. It is common to cry, "He ought to be the first to come to me;" but a Christian should not be loath to say, "I will be the first to go to him." Allay irritation—pacify tempestuous temper—send an embassy—invite reconciliation.

How prone we are to be suspicious, to detract, to be harsh in the construction of the conduct of others—to put the worst, instead of the best face on what others do! Origen, quoting, from the 37th Psalm, "To slay such as be of upright conversation," asks, "How can the man of upright conversation be slain? By scandal, and by retailing it. A man enters the Church of Christ with all simplicity, and with the desire of working out his salvation; but if this new brother should remark, either in the deeds

or words of those who are older in the faith, anything inconsistent with it—if he should hear scandal about others—and if it should be busy with himself, he may fall in consequence; and, when fallen, he is put to death, and the principle of life escapes from his soul, and his blood will fall on those who have shed it.” “How quickly a word can run!” says Bernard, in his twenty-fourth sermon on the Canticles. “One speaks, and only to one person; and yet that one word, entering the ears of a multitude of listeners, in a moment will slay innumerable souls. You may meet with people heaving deep sighs, looking very grave, and with a sorrowful countenance, yet uttering maledictions, the more plausible as they seem to come unwillingly from a sympathising heart. ‘I lament,’ he says, ‘for I love him enough.’ And another, ‘It was known to me, and I would not have divulged it; but since others have made it public, *I* cannot deny the fact.’ ‘I say it with grief, but it is too true.’ ‘It is a great calamity, for he is very good in many respects; but in this matter he cannot be excused.’”

So it was in the third century—so it was in the twelfth—so it is still. The early and the middle



ages of Christendom are in this respect the mirrors of the passing one. How many so-called Christians carry in their hearts the lust of detraction, strangers to the mercy which is slow to judge, and of the charity which covereth a multitude of sins! Yet they hope that Goodness and Mercy will follow *them* all their days!

XIII.

Home.

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“And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”—  
PSALM xxiii. 6.

1

THE exact use of the words *shall* and *will* is a puzzle to some who otherwise well understand the English language. No such distinction obtains in Hebrew or Greek, or indeed in any other language I am aware of; and hence the difficulty of making foreigners perceive it. Amongst ourselves, it is of comparatively recent date; for when our translation of the Bible was made, it does not seem to have been clearly apprehended by the translators. Had it been, would they have rendered 1 Kings xviii. 12, "Ahab *shall* slay me?" or Luke xiii. 24, "Many, I say unto you, *will* seek to enter in, and *shall* not be able?"

There is no ground in this last verse of the psalm for distinguishing between *shall* and *will*, and using them according to modern fashion, as though the Goodness and Mercy were to follow as matter of necessity, or as though David here professed an act of choice. He appears to be dwelling upon

his future privileges and blessed hopes, rather than his own resolutions ; upon the objects of his desire rather than the determination of his will. If any distinction between *shall* and *will* is here required, it appears to be, "Surely goodness and mercy *will* follow me all the days of my life ; and I *shall* dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

It is very likely that the words "House of the Lord" may at once suggest the idea of the temple at Jerusalem. But a second thought will suffice to banish it, as it will be remembered the temple was not built till after David's death.

David's "House of the Lord" must have been the tabernacle ; and it is interesting and instructive for a moment to glance at its condition when this psalm was written. We have already shewn the probable date to be after the young shepherd had received his anointing from Samuel, but before (we should conceive considerably before) his accession to the throne ; most likely previous to his quitting his pastoral occupations to become the captain of a roving band.

It is to be remarked, that at this period, the House of the Lord was in a very unsettled state. It was, in fact, broken up into two distinct and dis-

joined portions—or, rather, the shell of the tabernacle remained in one spot, the tent-like walls and curtains, with the altar of sacrifice; while that which really was the most precious treasure of the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant, was in another locality. The external structure, with its covering of goatskins, and the brazen altar, was at Shiloh, a city of Ephraim, which afterwards was known as Samaria; but the ark was at Kirjath-jearim, the city of forests. Miles lay between the ark and the altar, between the seat of the oracle, and the site for sacrifice! We can easily conceive of David's having seen both; of his having gone, after his anointing, to Shiloh, where Samuel was; of his having walked over the hills to the house where the ark was lodged. It would appear from the subsequent acts of David's life, that he was interested more in the ark than in the altar. It was the ark for which he provided a habitation on Mount Zion; it was the ark which he removed thither in solemn procession; and it was before the ark that he loved to inquire and to worship. Perhaps, then, the ark, more than the altar, was now the object of the psalmist's thoughts; yet there is no difficulty in

conceiving of a combination in his mind, relative to the two portions and elements of the House and its worship. In after life, he designed a temple, which should be a permanent realisation of the Divine idea of a tabernacle, with both altar and ark; and perhaps now some vision of what became the fixed object of desire in his latter days dawned on his mind.

1. "I will dwell in the House of the Lord for ever," expresses the psalmist's hope of constantly enjoying the privileges of public worship. He desired not simply to worship *alone*, or with some kindred soul, or with the family and the household, but with the great congregation—the assembly of the saints. David thought of the daily worship in the tabernacle, that temple in embryo; of the people wending their way over the hills, climbing up the rocks, pouring in joyous troops within the sacred enclosure, bowing down in united reverence before God's altar, and near God's throne—the silent homage of a thousand hearts, the service of song from a thousand lips. In that worship he wished to engage—and that not once a year, nor once a month, but *daily*—"to dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of his

life ;" that is, I conceive, to live near it, to have a large number of opportunities of engaging in it personally and fully,—to keep the heart ever attuned to divine exercises, so that to pass to them from other things, should not disturb the harmony of his life—and to make the loving service of Israel's God the keynote of his being. Put into a Christian form, the object of desire is this—to have one's own house and the house of God contiguous—often to pass out of the one to the other—to make the one a sort of vestibule to the other,—and ever to regard the sanctuary as our best home, where the soul can unburden itself and lie down in peace.

That the young shepherd should thus be absorbed in the prospect of the privileges of worship rather than the royalties of Israel—that he should think more of God's ark than his own throne, of the altar than the crown—indicates the spirituality of his character at this period, and shews how the youth's ambition was held in check by the nobler aspirations of Hebrew piety. And ever is this a test of character. What are the three ideas that have mastery in the soul? Are they *God*, *worship*, the *Church*?—or are they *self*, *pleasure*, the *world*?



2. But the words, "dwell in the House of the Lord," seem to mean something more than entering into the tabernacle of worship, however frequent and for however long. The idea is suggested, not merely of one who has his home elsewhere, and who pays a visit (no matter though it be daily or hourly) to this other desired abode, but also of one who covets and expects a home in this abode itself.

Now David, in the 27th Psalm, immediately after the expression of his desire, "That I may dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple," adds these significant words, "for in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion : in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me."

Something more is evidently meant here than an occasional worship in any particular structure. We have the idea of a covering which is as broad as the exigences and circumstances of his whole life—a covering under which he can hide himself in times of emergency—a covering at once sacred as the tabernacle and strong as a fortress. He is here obviously looking beyond local peculiarities and outward forms. So he is in the 91st Psalm, where he

represents himself as dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, and abiding under the shadow of the Almighty, and where, in figure after figure, he goes on indicating his trust and hope in the Divine presence and providence, throughout all the perils of his life-course. "I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress,"—David is like a man pursued by foes. "He shall deliver me from the snare of the fowler,"—David is as a bird encompassed by nets—"From the noisome pestilence,"—David is as a traveller walking through a plague-stricken city. "He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust,"—David is as a young eaglet in its parent's nest. "His truth shall be thy shield and buckler,"—David is as a soldier armed for the battle. "Thou hast made the Lord my refuge, the Most High thy habitation." "There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone,"—David speaks as a God-encompassed and angel-guarded soul.

Out of the psalm before us, then, so considered

and compared with others, there comes this beautiful expression of strong faith:—"Everywhere on this earth, and during every day of my life, shall I dwell in the Lord's house. The tabernacle is to me a figure of a nobler edifice, and the symbolic ark melts into a Divine and spiritual presence. The fields where I keep my sheep are a part of the Lord's house. So are the mountains, where the young lions suffer hunger. They are to me even as Shiloh and Kirjath-jearim. Bethlehem is the same; and so are all the plains of Ephraim and the hill country of Judea. Everywhere I am encircled by the Divine presence. His power, like strong walls, encompasses me on every side. His love and His care, like a curtain, cover and guard my head by night and day."

David's hoped-for future life, then, was not a frequent going out and in over the threshold of the Lord's house, but a constant abiding there. And there is a lesson in this for us; for it is our privilege on earth, not merely to *visit* God, but to *dwell* with God. It is a miserably low view of religious duty and privilege, to think of it as consisting in an occasional interview, however fre-

quent—to think of public worship as a weekly visit, or think of domestic and private worship as a daily visit. The right theory of a religious life is not that of a periodical approach to God, but of an habitual abiding with Him. Sundays are not exceptional days, but representative ones. Temples, tabernacles, churches, chapels, are not exceptional places, but representative ones. We are to be always with God—everywhere with God, for He is always and everywhere with us. Though our life be a pilgrimage, yet the Divine presence goes with us—even as in the grand, old, typical journey of the tribes of Israel, the people, when they marched, were constantly under the shadow of the Shekinah, and, when they rested, the ark was ever the centre round which their tents were pitched.

3. But the words, “dwell in the House of the Lord for ever,” are not exhausted yet. David, in another place, says, “In Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” And, again, “Thou wilt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.” Surely we do not go too far, if we say that David, who cordially believed in a future life, had some thoughts of it when

he uttered these words. What exactly these thoughts were, we cannot tell; and we must be careful, in the Old Testament, not to imagine that pious Jews knew as much as we highly-favoured Christians do. We are not to conclude that David was conscious of all those thoughts which his words will bear. Yet, while minding this, we are not to hesitate about taking his words as suggestive of those truths which a later revelation has communicated. While we distinguish between the historical interpretation and the spiritual improvement of the Old Testament, *this* improvement ought to go beyond *that* interpretation. Though David did not understand as much about heaven as we; yet how can we take up any words of his referring to the subject, without having our thoughts quickened and impelled to travel over the wider field of evangelical knowledge, for which any hint of his may serve as a starting-point?

Christians cannot think of these words, "dwell in the House of the Lord for ever," without advert-ing to the heavenly habitation—the house not made with hands—the blessed, restful home of all the Church. Thank God, we can associate thoughts of home even with our abode on earth; but our best

home-thoughts are in heaven. Taking home in its highest sense, we are going there.

Behold a parable :

Some of the inhabitants of one of the villages of Lebanon start for Jerusalem, to attend the feast of the Passover. The little party wind their way along the ledges of the cedar-crowned mountains, and through the paths which run across the fertile valleys, till they halt for rest at one of the border towns, where other families, bound on the same expedition, soon gather round them as fellow-pilgrims. Onward they go, over hill and dale, through the mountain-pass, and by the river-stream, singing the songs of Zion, and talking of the glorious things which have been spoken of the city of God. They pause, and are joined by fresh companions ; and again they march on toward their much-loved Jerusalem. At many a cottage door, at many a village border, at many a city gate, groups of cheerful Israelites, young and old, with smiling faces and beating hearts, stand waiting for their arrival, and greet their approach with a cordial welcome and a friendly embrace, and then fall into the augmented crowd, which swells, as it

passes on, like their own Jordan, fed by tributary streams and the showers of heaven. The band becomes a large caravan of travellers, including persons of both sexes, of all ages, and of every condition; together with camels and asses, laden with provisions and treasure. One large company meets another, tribe joins tribe, as they travel on through the diversified scenes of their fatherland. They go from spot to spot marked by some sacred story—some association of mystery or miracle—some deed of heroism—some proof of piety—some example, lesson, or warning—for no land is so rich in spiritual treasure as theirs—till the concourse, at the gates of Jerusalem, may be likened to a great army, but a peaceful one. They go from strength to strength, the members of one family, one race, bound for a common yet holy Home. And so it is with Christians. They are the true Israel—children of faithful Abraham—the heirs of promise. They are “brought nigh by the blood of Jesus.” They are “citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” The “many sons” on their way to glory are constantly receiving accessions to their number, as they sing the song of welcome,

"Come with us, and we will do you good ; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."

The Jewish pilgrim, on his way to Zion, passed different scenes, experienced a variety of emotions, met with many adventures. Now his path lay through verdant meadows, and fruitful fields, and rich vineyards, and shady woods, and delicious landscapes ; and then through dreary regions, gloomy valleys, barren moors, and stern mountain-passes. To-day, his thoughts and feelings were all joyous and hopeful, and his heart danced to the music of the birds and the holy hymns chanted by his company ; the next, depression came over his spirit, like the tempest-clouds which were hanging round the hills. Sometimes his progress was unimpeded by difficulties, and enlivened by pleasant companions ; and at other times accidents happened, and untoward circumstances arose. Yet, through all these changes of scene and feeling, the pilgrim was moving onward—*still*, step by step, he was getting nearer to Zion—*still* forward he went, going "from strength to strength."

Our pilgrimage to the Temple Home is like that. We have to lay in our account with vicissitudes—with trouble, as well as joy, foes as well as friends,



hindrances as well as helps, and disappointments as well as the fulfilment of hopes ; but, still, it is our duty and privilege, amidst all these changes, to *go on*—not to despair, to go back, or to stand still, but to go on, listening to the everlasting watchword of the Divine Leader, “Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.”

In conclusion, think of the grand home-gathering in the House of the Lord !

“I beheld, and, lo ! a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb.” There is the destination of the pilgrim Church. There is the home and resting-place of all pious souls since the world began—of the vast procession of the saints of God, increasing in number from age to age. “Before the Throne”—in the immediate presence of God ; “before the Lamb”—in the immediate presence of Christ. There the Church will find its rest, its joy, its glory. On that prospect Christians will ever delight to fix their eyes. It is not so much the scenery of heaven that attracts them as the light and glory of the God of heaven

The truly pious Jew, in the olden time, going to

Zion, would not think so much of the architectural glories of Jerusalem, and of the pomp and splendour of the temple, as of the communion he was there to have with the Lord God. The vision of the august sanctuary whose courts he was to tread, its gilded roofs and richly-garnished walls would rise before him, as he walked along the dusty road to Zion ; but the thought that in Zion he would “appear before God”—that *there* he would behold the beauty of the Lord in *His own temple*—that there he would be covered with power as with a shield—that there he would bask in *His* smile, as beneath the summer sunbeams—that before the altar he would find a resting-place, like the downy nest, where the weary and storm-stricken bird folds up its drenched and ruffled wings, and seeks repose. Oh, that thought would absorb every other, and engross his mind ! And so, in thinking of heaven, you will chiefly think of seeing God in *His* temple, of beholding *His* glory in the humanity of Christ—that everlasting *Shekinah*—not a faint beam, struggling from behind a thick curtain, as in the Jewish sanctuary, but the unveiled radiance of the Godhead shining in the face of Jesus Christ.

In that temple every true Christian will at length

appear. It sometimes happened, during the pilgrimages in ancient days, that one of the party sickened and drooped and died by the way—he never reached Jerusalem—his family looked for him there in vain—his ashes were resting in some distant burial-place by the roadside ; and his companions, as they went home, would pause to weep over the new-made grave. But no true Christian will miss seeing the Holy City, Each genuine believer shall reach the Mount of God. The great Leader of Souls will conduct us safely there. There will be no reason to prevent His saying, “Of all that thou hast given me I have lost nothing.”

And—oh, joyful thought!—while the Jews assembled in Jerusalem only for a season, and worshipped in the temple but for a few short hours, and then went home, retracing their steps to their humble dwellings, there to resume their toils and cares,—Christians are to be pillars in the house of God, to go out no more for ever.

“For ever with the Lord!

Amen—so let it be;

Life from the dead is in that word—

‘Tis immortality!”

“I SHALL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD  
FOR EVER.”







